NATION

Sambhal tense as bulldozers clear illegal structures

≫ Page: 4 ≪

BUSINESS

FPIs infuse ₹22,766 crore in first two weeks of Dec

≫ Page: 7 ≪

SPORTS

BGT: Head, Smith's ton put Australia ahead

≫ Page: 8 ≪

www.twitter.com/EnglishSalar
www.facebook.com/EnglishSalar
www.instagram.com/dailysalarenglish
youtube.com/@dailysalardigital

SALAR
DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

سالار روزنامہ بنگلور

Website: salarnews.in | www.magzter.com | 16 DECEMBER 2024 | MONDAY | BENGALURU | 14 JUMADA II, 1446 AH | Vol 4 | Issue No 321 | Pages: 8

SALAR
DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY IS
HIRING!

NEWS CONTENT CREATOR
EXPERIENCE AT LEAST 5 YEARS
Requirements: Adhere to SEO principles. Research and curate content for social media.

CHIEF REPORTER
EXPERIENCE AT LEAST 7 YEARS
Requirements: Manage a team of reporters. A skilled writer with a passion for uncovering stories that matter.

JUNIOR REPORTERS
EXPERIENCE 2-3 YEARS.
FRESHERS WELCOME.

SEND YOUR RESUMES TO:
hr.salarnews@gmail.com
anushreeirwin@gmail.com

M'rashtra: 19 BJP, 11 Sena & 9 NCP ministers take oath

Ajit says some ministers to have tenure of two-and-a-half yrs

NAGPUR, 15 DEC

A total of 39 legislators from Mahayuti allies were sworn in on Sunday in the first cabinet expansion of the 10-day-old Devendra Fadnavis-led ministry including 16 new faces, while 10 former ministers were excluded.

Hours before the cabinet expansion ceremony, Deputy CM and NCP leader Ajit Pawar said that some of those who took oath will have a tenure of two-and-a-half-years, underlining constrains in accommodating aspirations of hopefuls.

While 33 legislators were sworn in as cabinet ministers, six took oath as ministers of state.

The new council of ministers reflects Fadnavis' efforts in balancing caste equations including sections of Marathas, OBCs, SCs, and STs and striking a regional balance.

With the new inductees, the strength of the Fadnavis-led ministry has gone up to 42, including the CM and his deputies Eknath Shinde (Shiv Sena) and Ajit Pawar (NCP). One berth was kept vacant.

While BJP secured 19 ministerial berths by virtue of being the largest among allies, Shinde-led Shiv Sena and Ajit Pawar's Nationalist Congress Party were allotted 11 and 9 berths, respectively.

Governor CP Radhakrishnan administered the oath to the new ministers at a ceremony held on the eve of the state legislature's winter session in Nagpur. *—PTI*

Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, Deputy Chief Ministers Ajit Pawar and Eknath Shinde during the swearing-in ceremony of Cabinet ministers, at Raj Bhavan, in Nagpur, on Sunday **PHOTO: ANI**

Kejri to fight from New Delhi, Atishi named for Kalkaji

NEW DELHI, 15 DEC

After AAP released its final list of candidates for the upcoming Assembly polls in Delhi, party chief Arvind Kejriwal took a swipe at the BJP, alleging that the saffron party has no chief ministerial face.

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) on Sunday released its final list of 38 candidates for the Assembly polls due in February, fielding Kejriwal from New Delhi and repeating Chief Minister Atishi from Kalkaji.

In a post on X in Hindi, Kejriwal said, "The party is contesting the elections with full confidence and full preparation. BJP is missing. They have no CM face, no team, no planning and no vision for Delhi. They have only one slogan, only one policy and only one mission – Remove Kejriwal. Ask them what they did in five years, and they reply, Kejriwal ko bahut gaali di (cursed Kejriwal a lot)."

The BJP, which is yet to announce its candidates, is reportedly planning to pitch Parvesh Verma, son of former Delhi Chief Minister late Sahib Singh Verma, against Kejriwal in New Delhi.

The Congress, meanwhile, has announced 21 candidates, including Sandeep Dikshit, son of ex-Chief Minister late Sheila Dikshit, who will challenge Kejriwal in New Delhi.

In its bid for a third consecutive term in power in the national capital, AAP has nominated Environment Minister Gopal Rai from Babarpur, Health Minister Saurabh Bhardwaj from Greater Kailash and former Health Minister Satyendar Jain from Shakur Basti.

Ministers Raghuvinder Shokeen and Mukesh Kumar Ahlawat will contest from Nangloi Jat and Sultanpur Majra, respectively. *—PTI*

AAP National Convener Arvind Kejriwal and New Delhi CM Atishi **PHOTO: PTI**

PM to launch river projects worth ₹40K cr in Rajasthan

SURAT, 15 DEC

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is scheduled to launch an ambitious project worth approximately Rs 40,000 crore on 17 December, aimed at linking 11 rivers in Rajasthan. This initiative is projected to transform the state into a water-surplus region, according to Union Jalshakti Minister CR Patil.

Addressing the inauguration of a semiconductor plant by Suchi Semicon, Minister Patil underscored the urgency of addressing Rajasthan's severe water crisis and called on corporations to engage in water harvesting efforts for future sustainability. "Modi Saheb's forthcoming project will ensure that Rajasthan has abundant water supply," he stated. *—PTI*

TRAVEL BOOST

PHOTO: PTI

Russia to offer visa-free travel for Indians from 2025

NEW DELHI, 15 DEC

Indian tourists may soon be able to visit Russia without the need for a visa, with a visa-free travel arrangement expected to begin by spring 2025. This development follows discussions between Russia and India in June 2023 about a bilateral agreement aimed at simplifying visa procedures, particularly for group tourist exchanges.

The potential visa-free access builds on previous progress, including a major update in August 2023, when Indian travellers became eligible for e-visas to Russia, which can be processed in as little as four days. In 2023, India ranked among the top five countries utilising Russia's e-visa system, with around 9,500 visas issued to Indian citizens, accounting for 6 per cent of the total. While the majority of Indian visitors travel to Russia for business or work, the number of Indian tourists has been steadily rising. Over 60,000 Indians visited Moscow in 2023, marking a 26 per cent increase from the previous year.

By early 2024, India became the third-largest non-CIS country for business tourism to Russia, with nearly 1,700 e-visas issued in the first quarter alone. This growth follows Russia's initiative in August 2023 to offer visa-free entry to citizens of China and Iran under a tourist exchange program, which has yielded positive results.

Currently, Indian passport holders enjoy visa-free access to 62 countries worldwide, and Russia could soon join that list. *—Agencies*

- In 2023, India ranked among the top five countries utilising Russia's e-visa system, with around 9,500 visas issued to Indian citizens, accounting for 6 per cent of the total.

Judge who made communal remarks to appear before SC

NEW DELHI, 15 DEC

Justice Shekhar Kumar Yadav of the Allahabad High Court is expected to appear before the Supreme Court Collegium to address controversial remarks made during a Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) event. On 8 December, Justice Yadav claimed that the purpose of a uniform civil code was to foster social harmony and gender equality, stirring widespread criticism after videos of his speech went viral. The Supreme Court took note of media reports and requested an official report from the Allahabad High Court regarding the incident. The court typically allows judges under scrutiny to present their version of events. Concerns have been raised regarding potential breaches of judicial ethics. *—PTI*

Man beaten to death in Bihar over 'tractor' theft

PATNA, 15 DEC

A man died after being brutally thrashed by a mob on Saturday in Bihar's Muzaffarpur through the freezing night, allegedly on suspicion of stealing a tractor, police said. Despite his pleas for mercy, the mob continued to beat him. The incident occurred in Yogiya village of Rajkhand North Panchayat, around 70 km from Patna. The victim, identified as Shambhu Sahni, was reportedly accompanied by three others who managed to escape, according to the police. Disturbing images from crime scene show Shambhu lying motionless on the ground, wearing beige trousers, a sky-blue shirt, and a grey jacket. *—PTI*

LS TO TAKE UP 'ONOE' BILLS AT THE END

NEW DELHI, 15 DEC

The government has deferred the introduction of bills related to One Nation, One Election (ONOE) in the Lok Sabha till after the completion of financial business, sources said.

Earlier, the two bills – The Constitution (129th Amendment) Bill and The Union Territories Laws (Amendment) Bill) – were listed for introduction in the Lok Sabha on Monday.

The sources in the government said the bills could be brought later this week after the House passes the first batch of supplementary demands for grants listed for Monday.

The revised list of business, issued by the Lok Sabha secretariat, does not have the two bills on the agenda for Monday.

However, the government can always bring in legislative agenda to Parliament at the last minute through 'Supplementary List of Business' with the permission of the Lok Sabha Speaker. *—PTI*

Lanka President begins 3-day India visit

NEW DELHI, 15 DEC

Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Disanayaka arrived in India on Sunday on a three-day visit in his first foreign trip after assuming the top office in September.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will hold wide-ranging talks with the Sri Lankan leader on Monday that is expected to focus on trade, investment, energy and maritime security.

The Indian side is also likely to convey to the Sri Lankan leader New Delhi's expectations from Colombo to fulfil the aspirations of the Tamil community in the island nation.

Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake being received by Union Minister of State Murugan in New Delhi **PHOTO: PTI**

Sri Lanka is India's closest maritime neighbour in the Indian Ocean Region and holds a central place in Prime Minister Modi's vision of 'SAGAR' (Security and Growth for All in the Region) and India's 'Neighbourhood First' policy, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said on Friday.

Issues relating to maritime security cooperation are likely to figure during Disanayaka's visit, people familiar with the matter said.

India has been expanding its overall defence and strategic ties with Sri Lanka amid concerns over China's attempts to increase its military presence in the Indian Ocean.

The docking of the Chinese missile and satellite tracking ship 'Yuan Wang' at Hambantota port in August 2022 had triggered a diplomatic row between India and Sri Lanka. Another Chinese warship docked at the Colombo port in August last year. *—PTI*

IN JUDICIAL CUSTODY

Cops arrest wife, family in techie's suicide

BENGALURU/LUCKNOW, 15 DEC

Bengaluru Police have arrested three individuals, including the estranged wife of tech executive Atul Subhash, who recently died by suicide. Nikita Singhania was apprehended in Gurugram, Haryana, while her mother, Nisha Singhania, and brother, Anurag Singhania, were detained in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh, on charges of abetting Subhash's suicide, as reported by police officials.

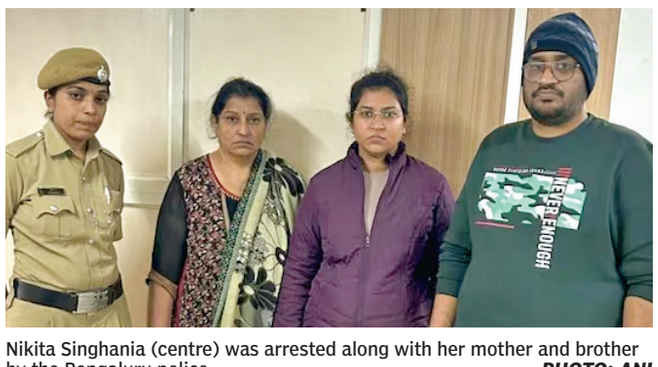
The arrests took place on Saturday morning, and the trio was subsequently flown to Bengaluru, where they were remanded to 14 days of judicial custody after appearing in a local court.

On Sunday, a senior Prayagraj police official noted that Bengaluru police had not informed them about the arrests of Nisha and Anurag Singhania. Atul Subhash, 34, was discovered hanging in his residence in Munnekolalu, Bengaluru, on December 9. In the aftermath, he left behind extensive videos and notes, blaming his wife and her family for driving him towards this drastic action, claiming they subjected him to "false" accusations and ongoing harassment.

Karnataka Home Minister G Parameshwara confirmed the arrests and stated that Subhash's extensive 40-page note raised significant concerns over the misuse of laws intended to protect women. He commented on the broader implications regarding men's rights, suggesting this incident has sparked a national debate on potential legal reforms.

Following Subhash's death, Nikita Singhania, along with her mother and brother, had sought anticipatory bail from the Allahabad High Court after Bengaluru Police issued a summons for Nikita to appear within three days. Local accounts suggest that their residences in Uttar Pradesh appeared abandoned, with locked gates and drawn curtains since the family went into hiding. Police notices were prominently displayed around Nikita Singhania's home. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 2



Nikita Singhania (centre) was arrested along with her mother and brother by the Bengaluru police. **PHOTO: ANI**

Tabla falls silent as maestro Zakir Hussain dies

SAN FRANCISCO, 15 DEC

Tabla maestro Zakir Hussain passed away at the age of 73 on Sunday. He had been admitted to the ICU of a hospital in San Francisco for heart-related complications, according to his friend and flautist Rakesh Chaurasia.

The US-based tabla maestro had been battling blood pressure issues, according to Hussain's manager, Nirmala Bachani.

Throughtout his career, Hussain won five Grammy Awards, including three at the 66th Grammy Awards earlier this year. In a career spanning six decades, Zakir Hussain collaborated with several renowned artists, both Indian and international. His 1973 project with English guitarist John McLaughlin, violinist L Shankar, and percussionist TH 'Vikku' Vinayakram was groundbreaking. The collaboration fused Indian classical music with jazz, creating a unique sound never heard before. Born on 9 March, 1951, in Mumbai, to tabla maestro Alla Rakha and Bavi Begum, he showed a natural talent for music from an early age. He began learning mridangam under the guidance of his father when he was just three years old, and by the age of 12, he was already performing at concerts. *—Agencies*

PHOTO: X

Former BBMP corporator foils mobile snatching

BENGALURU, 15 DEC: Two bike-borne mobile thieves were apprehended early on Sunday morning after a collision with a car driven by Ganesh Reddy, former Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) corporator. The incident occurred around 5:40 am when Reddy, on his way to the gym, noticed a man shouting for help after his mobile phone was snatched. Spotting the thieves fleeing on a motorcycle, Reddy quickly pursued them in his SUV. Reddy intercepted the suspects near HBR Layout 8th Cross by ramming their bike. The situation escalated when one of the thieves brandished a knife and threatened Reddy. Despite this, Reddy demanded the return of the stolen phone, and the thieves eventually threw it away before fleeing. The incident was captured on CCTV. *—Salar News*

Sankethi Samaj hailed for work in Kannada

MYSURU, 15 DEC

Litterateur Prof K Anantharamu on Sunday urged Sankethi Brahmin Samaj writers to continue their contribution to the growth of Kannada literature. In his address at the second Sankethi Samaj literary conference held at Nacharamma Bhavan at Jayanagar in Mysuru, Anantharamu asked the writers to participate enthusiastically in all events held by the Kannada Sahitya Parishat, Kendra Sahitya Parishath and Akhila Kannada Sahitya Parishat in Mysuru. Sankethi Brahman Samaj has a population of 40,000 in the state. Writer LML Shastry, who presided over the event, also elaborated on the richness of Sankethi Kannada literature and its writers' contributions to Kannada, including studies on Kannada grammar. *—PTI*

Seer launches Rath Yatra for communal harmony, peace

MYSURU, 15 DEC

Adichunchanagiri Mutt's seer Someshwaranatha Swamiji on Sunday launched the Rath Yatra rally in Mysuru for communal harmony organised by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), which began from the foothills of Chamundi Hill in Mysuru on Sunday. Addressing the gathering, Swamiji stressed that the nation has faced numerous invasions and external disturbances throughout history, which have divided the people emotionally. Despite claims of unity, Swamiji noted, the emotional divide continues to persist. He called for an urgent need to instill patriotism and nationalism across all faiths to unite the people for the nation's well-being. Vishwa Hindu Parishad Mysuru Division Secretary M Venkataramu, also speaking at the event, pointed out the progress the nation has achieved. *—Salar News*

Didn't give ₹150 cr bribe for Waqf: BJP head

Siddaramaiah had said that Vijayendra attempted to bribe ex-Minority Commission head

BENGALURU, 15 DEC

Karnataka BJP President BY Vijayendra has sharply refuted accusations made by Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Congress leaders that he attempted to bribe former Minority Commission Chairperson Anwar Manippady to suppress a report on Waqf property encroachments.

In a statement on Saturday, Siddaramaiah claimed that Manippady publicly alleged that Vijayendra visited his home during the tenure of former Chief Minister BS Yediyurappa and offered him Rs 150 crore to remain silent about the encroachment report. However, Manippady has denied any such offer made by Vijayendra, while Home Minister G Parameshwara suggested that video footage exists supporting the allegations.

Questioning the validity of the charges, Vijayendra expressed scepticism, stating, "As the son of the then Chief Minister, why would I go to Anwar Manippady's house and offer Rs 150 crore? Is there any logic to this accusation?"

He characterised the allegations as a desperate attempt by the Congress party to divert attention from ongoing corruption allegations against them, particularly concerning the MUDA site allotments.

Vijayendra further stated that if the Congress seeks to use this issue to delay proceedings in the legislature, it would be "the height of stupidity."

He indicated his readiness to respond to these allegations in the Assembly if raised.

Manippady clarified to reporters that Vijayendra never visited his home, emphasising that he had not known him at the time the report was submitted in 2012.

Reacting to the developments, Parameshwara maintained that Manippady's previous statements suggested a different narrative.

Vijayendra accused the Congress government of shirking discussions on pressing issues, including recent maternal deaths in government hospitals, and expressed frustration at what he called the government's "irresponsible" behaviour.

He asserted that the BJP would confront any politically motivated investigations with courage. *—PTI*

ವಕ್ಫ್ ಬೋರ್ಡ್ ಹಗರಣವನ್ನು ಮುಚ್ಚಿಹಾಕಲು ಬಿಜೆಪಿಯ ವಿಜಯೇಂದ್ರ
150 ಕೋಟಿ ಲಂಚದ ಆಮಿಷ ಒಡ್ಡಿರುವ ಹಿನ್ನೆಲೆಯಲ್ಲಿ ಪ್ರಧಾನಿ ಮೋದಿಜಿ
ಈ ಪ್ರಕರಣವನ್ನು ಕೂಡಲೆ ಸಿಬಿಐ ತನಿಖೆಗೆ ವಹಿಸಬೇಕು
Prime Minister Modi should immediately
hand over the case to CBI investigation after
BJP's Vijayendra has offered bribe of
IN THE NAME OF WAQF BOARD, GIVING WRONG INFORMATION
TO THE PUBLIC AND TO CLOSE THE CASE 150 CRORES BRIBE
IS OFFERED, BJP SHOULD LET KNOW WHOSE AMOUNT IS THIS?

Congress workers in Bengaluru protest on Sunday, demanding a CBI inquiry into allegations that State BJP President BY Vijayendra paid a bribe of Rs 150 crore to cover up the Waqf Board scam ***PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD***

'No room for factional politics in party'

BENGALURU, DEC 15

BY Vijayendra ***PHOTO: PTI***

BY Vijayendra, president of the Karnataka BJP, has called for an end to factional politics within the party, declaring that unofficial meetings are unacceptable. His remarks come amid reports of a planned rally in Davangere, intended as a display of support for him by a group of party leaders and former legislators, led by ex-minister MP Renukacharya.

Vijayendra emphasised that there are no factions within the BJP and that all members should act as dedicated party workers. "Our conduct has already created confusion among party supporters in the state," he stated, urging former legislators and party leaders to refrain from organising such events, which he believes only exacerbate misunderstandings.

The proposed rally is perceived as a counteraction to dissenting factions led by senior MLAs Basanagouda Patil Yatnal and Ramesh Jarkiholi, who have been openly critical of Vijayendra and his father, veteran politician BS Yediyurappa, accusing them of consolidating control over the party.

Following a meeting with party leadership in Delhi, Yatnal's group has toned down its activities after receiving a show-cause notice. Vijayendra, in a statement shared on X, reiterated his commitment to unify the party, revealing plans for a meeting with MLAs, former MLAs, and senior party members to bolster organisational strength. He concluded by asserting that all activities should adhere to party rules and objectives. *—PTI*

BJP not interested in discussing North K'taka issues: DKS

HUBBALLI, 15 DEC

DK Shivakumar ***PHOTO: X***

- The winter session, which commenced on 9 December, will extend into the upcoming week. Belagavi, which has been hosting annual legislative sessions since 2006.

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar on Sunday criticised BJP for not showing any interest in discussing issues pertaining to North Karnataka during the ongoing winter session of the legislature in Belagavi.

She stated that the BJP is a "divided house" and lacking interest in meaningful discussions. "BJP is not interested in any discussion; they are focused solely on politics. There is no unity among them, which is why they are behaving this way," he told reporters, referencing the lack of dialogue on pressing matters impacting north Karnataka thus far.

The winter session, which commenced on 9 December, will extend into the upcoming week. Belagavi, which has been hosting annual legislative sessions since 2006, is a focal point of contention between Karnataka and Maharashtra, both claiming sovereignty over the region.

Responding to queries about irrigation issues for north Karnataka, Shivakumar, who also oversees Water Resources, expressed the government's readiness for discussions. He provided an update on the Mahadayi project—a water diversion initiative for drought-stricken districts—indicating that the government has called for tenders and is awaiting Central permissions to proceed.

Regarding the Covid-19 scam linked to the previous BJP administration, Shivakumar noted that actions are being taken based on the Justice Michael D' Cunha Commission report, with FIRs filed in accordance with its recommendations, but no politicians have been named yet. *—PTI*

Temple body files FIR against Snehamayi

MYSURU, 15 DEC

Krishnaraja police on Sunday filed an FIR and launched an inquiry against RTI activist Snehamayi Krishna, based on a complaint lodged by Sri Chamundeshwari Kshetra Development Authority (SCKDA) Secretary Roopa.

Three days ago, Krishna had filed a complaint with Krishnaraja Police against Roopa and other staff at the SCKDA, accusing them of stealing sarees offered to the deity by the devotees. He had also handed over to the police a video clip related to the alleged theft, demanding an investigation into the incident.

Following this, Roopa filed a counter complaint against Krishna, accusing him of levelling false charges against her and obstructing the duty of a government servant. She said what was shown in the video footage was office files tied into a bundle with a green saree being shifted to her house in her official vehicle.

Roopa said she has the permission to carry office files to her residence.

She said the SCKDA earns between Rs 1–2 crore by auctioning sarees donated by devotees to the temple every year. Her office has always maintained transparency in the auction process. *—Salar News*

INSIGHTS AT LIT FESTIVAL

Visitors attends an interactive session by Sudha Murty at Bangalore Literature Festival on its 2nd day on Sunday ***PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD***

2 associates of Drone Pratap held after sodium blast

TUMAKURU, 15 DEC

Two associates of 'Drone Pratap' were apprehended by the Midigeshi police following a sodium blast incident at an agricultural site in Honda, Tumakuru district. The arrests took place during a late-night operation on Saturday as part of an ongoing investigation.

The two suspects, identified as Vinay, a cameraman who recorded the explosion, and Prajwal, who managed the sodium chemical involved in the experiment, were taken into custody after police traced their involvement. Authorities revealed that Pratap had procured sodium salt from a local shop for the purpose of conducting a drone blast experiment.

In the wake of the explosion, police launched a search operation that led to these arrests, while a third suspect remains at large. Drone Pratap himself has been remanded to police custody for three days by the JMFC court in Madhugiri to assist with the investigation.

The Midigeshi police have registered a case against three individuals, including the owner of the farmland where the incident took place. Additionally, a suo motu case has been initiated by the police to probe the circumstances surrounding the blast further.

The investigation continues, with authorities intensifying efforts to locate the absconding suspect and to uncover further details about the experiment and its underlying motives. *—Salar News*

Seer condemns lathicharge on Panchamasali protesters

Panchamasali Lingayat members protested demanding quota for them, in Belagavi ***PHOTO: PTI***

MYSURU, 15 DEC

Chidananda Swamiji, the seer of Hosa Mutt in Mysuru, on Sunday condemned the lathicharge on Panchamasali activists in Belagavi, calling it an unjustified action against peaceful demonstrators.

Speaking to reporters, the seer expressed his concerns over Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's recent shift in stance regarding reservation for the Panchamasali community under the 2A category. Siddaramaiah had previously supported their demand for inclusion in this category, but has now changed his position, a move that Swamiji described as troubling.

- He urged the Chief Minister to reconsider his decision and to grant the community inclusion under the 2A category.

He highlighted that the majority of Panchamasali Lingayats continue to face significant educational and economic challenges. He urged the Chief Minister to reconsider his decision and to grant the community inclusion under the 2A category, rather than the current 3B category, which he argued does not adequately address the community's needs. *—Salar News*

2 KILLED IN ROAD ACCIDENTS IN BENGALURU

BENGALURU, 15 DEC

Two individuals have lost their lives in separate accidents reported within the city over the past 24 hours.

In the first incident, a 30-year-old man named Nagesh, a resident of Govindashetty Palya and employee at a garment factory, was killed in a collision involving a car and his two-wheeler near Hosa Road. The accident occurred on Sunday at approximately 3.45am as Nagesh was riding towards Konappana Agrahara Junction. According to officials from the Electronic City traffic police, an overspeeding car allegedly collided with Nagesh's bike, resulting in him being thrown off his vehicle. Despite urgent attempts to rush him to a nearby hospital, Nagesh succumbed to his injuries en route. Authorities have conducted an investigation at the accident site and registered a case to ascertain the circumstances surrounding the event.

In a separate incident on Saturday, a pedestrian named Marvin Andrew, a 38-year-old office attendant, was struck fatally by a canter truck near the KR Puram Metro Station at around 7.15pm. Eyewitnesses reported that the speeding truck hit Andrew as he crossed the road after alighting from a BMTC bus. Though he was rushed to a hospital, Andrew did not survive his injuries. The Marathahalli traffic police are investigating the incident. *—Salar News*

Ex-mayor demands panel for new property tax

MYSURU, 15 DEC

Former mayor S Bhyrappa has urged the state government to establish district-level consultative committees, led by the Deputy Commissioner, prior to implementing property assessments and issuing khatas under the recently introduced Karnataka Municipalities and Certain Other Law Amendment Act, 2024.

At a press conference on Sunday, Bhyrappa explained that the new legislation aims to regulate the taxation of unauthorised buildings across urban municipalities. The act empowers local bodies, including the Mysuru City Corporation and several newly formed town panchayats, to levy property taxes on all structures, whether legal or illegal, as well as on vacant lands and unauthorised layouts built in violation of existing building bylaws.

Since the law, introduced last September, has already received the Governor's approval through a gazette notification, its implementation is imminent. Urban local bodies, including MUDA, have the authority to issue A Khatas and B Khatas for properties.

Bhyrappa expressed concern for residents in older residential areas such as Bandikeri and Ashokapuram, who lack khatas for their properties despite paying property taxes. He emphasised the need to protect the market value of these areas, warning that bureaucratic confusion could arise during tax collection and property documentation processes. *—PTI*

UNTIL JUSTICE IS DONE

Techie's dad 'won't' immerse son's ashes

SAMASTIPUR, 15 DEC

Police personnel paste a notice at the residence of Nikita Singhania, wife of engineer Atul Subhash ***PHOTO: PTTI***

The father of Bengaluru techie Atul Subhash, who died by suicide recently, on Sunday called for strict punishment for those who "harassed" his son, asserting that his ashes will not be immersed till justice is served.

Subhash, 34, was found hanging in his house at Bengaluru's Munnekolalu on 9 December. He left behind lengthy videos and notes, blaming his wife and in-laws for driving him to suicide through "false" cases and "persistent torture".

"I thank the Karnataka Police for arresting them (Subhash's estranged wife and in-laws)," Pawan Kumar told reporters here.

"My son was being harassed and tortured for money, and humiliated by his wife... I request Prime Minister Narendra Modi and all concerned... please give us justice," he said.

Kumar also sought the custody of his four-year-old grandson.

"My son was broken from inside... Even after torture by his wife and in-laws, he didn't tell anyone about it. His suicide note also mentioned that his parents be given custody of his child," Kumar said.

He said Subhash had also received a maintenance order for his son, amounting to Rs 40,000 per month.

"She (Subhash's estranged wife) filed several false cases against us and my son.," Kumar said.

Bikas Kumar, the brother of Subhash, also spoke to media-persons in Samastipur, demanding that the "false cases" registered against them be withdrawn.

"I am equally concerned about my nephew (son of Subhash). We have not seen him in recent photographs. I want to know his whereabouts through the media," added Bikas Kumar. *—PTI*

Himanta alleges Soros links with Assam MP

GUWAHATI, 15 DEC

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma alleged on Sunday that an MP from the state has links with US-based billionaire George Soros, amid the BJP's charge against the Congress central leadership of conniving with the investor to destabilise the country. Sarma, however, did not mention the name or party of the MP. "An Assam MP also has links with George Soros. I don't want to get into this controversy," Sarma told reporters on the sidelines of a programme, when asked about the Congress-Soros issue. To a question whether the MP in question had won his election with financial help from the US investor, the CM said, "I cannot comment on it as I have no evidence. Anyway, I am not much interested in this matter." *—PTI*

Delhi polls: BJP's Ramesh, wife Kusum joins AAP

NEW DELHI, 15 DEC

BJP leader Ramesh Pehalwan, along with his wife and two-time councillor Kusum Lata, joined the AAP on Sunday, ahead of the Delhi Assembly polls. Ramesh Pehalwan is likely to contest the upcoming polls from the Kasturba Nagar seat and will replace three-time MLA Madan Lal. Kusum Lata is a two-time Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) councillor from the Kotla Mubarakpur ward of South Delhi. Ramesh Pehalwan said, "I am returning home today. The whole world sees Delhi through Kejriwal's eyes. Whether it is a matter of children going abroad or a child speaking French on the world stage, it is because of Kejriwal. My father was a government employee. Delhi will move ahead." *—PTI*

Telangana Cong asks KCR to attend Assembly

HYDERABAD, 15 DEC

Accusing the BRS of spreading misinformation about the Congress government in Telangana, the party's state president B Mahesh Kumar Goud on Sunday asked BRS supremo K Chandrasekhar Rao to participate in the Assembly and offer constructive advice. In an open letter addressed to BRS president and former Telangana Chief Minister, Goud said this letter coincides with the completion of one year of Congress governance in the state and seeks to address the unfounded allegations made by Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) leaders against the Congress government. Congress state president Goud said that even after the people ended the "divisive, sentiment-driven regime of BRS". Winter session of Telangana will resume on 16 December. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Mayawati slams SP, Congress on reservation

LUCKNOW, 15 DEC

Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) chief Mayawati on Sunday attacked the Congress and the Samajwadi Party, saying they have no right to speak on reservations. The BSP chief said the two parties colluded in opposing a legislation giving quota in promotions to Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) when the Congress-led UPA was in power. Mayawati demanded that reservations for SC, ST and OBC be included in the Ninth Schedule of the Constitution to prevent any tampering. Central and state laws listed in the Ninth Schedule are exempt from judicial review. The former UP chief minister also backed the Centre's legislation on One Nation, One Election, saying that it will reduce election expenses and ensure that public welfare works continue uninterrupted. *—PTI*

Uddhav's Sena (UBT) drops 'return to Hindutva' hints

This comes after the drubbing the party received in M'rashtra polls

MUMBAI, 15 DEC

Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena (UBT) has dropped broad hints over the past few days of going back to its core Hindutva agenda after the drubbing the party received in 20 November Maharashtra polls.

The party has mounted a strident attack on the Centre for atrocities on Hindus in Bangladesh after the fall of the Sheikh Hasina government in the neighbouring country in August and has now come forward to "protect" an "80-year-old" Hanuman Temple outside Mumbai's Dadar station that was been served a demolition notice by the railways.

Signalling its intent on the issue, Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Aaditya Thackeray performed 'maha aarti' at the temple amid efforts by the party to corner the ruling BJP on the Hindutva plank.

Earlier, on 6 December, the party raised hackles of some allies when Uddhav Thackeray's close aide and MLC Milind Narvekar posted a photo of the Babri Masjid demolition on social media site X along with the combative "I am proud of those who did it" quote of Shiv Sena founder Bal Thackeray. The mosque in Ayodhya was brought down on December 6, 1992.

The move rattled Samajwadi Party's Maharashtra chief Abu Azmi who said his outfit was walking out of the Maha Vikas Aghadi, which also comprises the Congress and Sharad Pawar-led Nationalist Congress Party (SP) apart from Shiv Sena (UBT).

On Friday, Uddhav Thackeray had attacked the Union government over the atrocities on Hindus in Bangladesh and sought to know the steps taken by India to protect the community in the neighbouring nation.

Observers said these moves mark change in the policy of Sena (UBT), which severed ties in 2019 with its long time ally BJP and joined hands with Congress and NCP but stuck to its 'Marathi manoos' (sons of the soil) plank. *—PTI*

Shiv Sena (UBT) President Uddhav Thackeray PHOTO: PTI

MVA slams govt, boycotts winter session tea party

NAGPUR, 15 DEC

The Opposition MVA on Sunday targeted the Maharashtra government over farmers' plight, price rise, jobs and a sarpanch's murder and declared it would boycott the customary tea party on the eve of the state legislature's winter session here.

Hours before the cabinet expansion of the government in the evening, leaders of the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA), comprising the Shiv Sena (UBT), NCP (SP) and Congress, held a press conference at Ravi Bhavan in the city to slam the BJP-led dispensation.

Leader of Opposition in the Legislative Council Ambadas Danve said government was doing a "drama" by keeping the session only for six days. Earlier, Nagpur session used to be held between three weeks and one month, he said. *—PTI*

'ACCEPT THE LOSS'

Stop whining about EVMs, Omar tells Cong

NEW DELHI, 15 DEC

Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah during an interview with PTI, in New Delhi PHOTO: PTI

Opening another point of friction with an important ally, Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah has dismissed the Congress party's vehement objection to Electronic Voting Machines, and echoed the BJP's defence – you accept election results when you win, but blame EVMs when you lose.

"When you get a hundred plus members of Parliament using the same EVMs, and you celebrate that as sort of a victory for your party, you can't a few months later turn around and say we don't like these EVMs because now the election results aren't going the way we would like them to," Abdullah said on Friday.

When he was told that he sounded like a BJP spokesperson, Abdullah said, "God forbid! No, it's just that... what's right is right."

The CM said he speaks based on principles rather than with partisan loyalty and cited his support for infrastructure projects like the Central Vista as an example of his independent thinking.

"Contrary to what everybody else believes, I think what's happening with this Central Vista project in Delhi is a good thing. I believe constructing a new Parliament building was an excellent idea. We needed a new Parliament building. The old one had outlived its utility," he said.

Abdullah said political parties should not contest the elections if they do not trust the voting mechanism. "If you have problems with the EVMs, then you should be consistent in those problems." *—PTI*

GRAND WELCOME TO NEW CM

Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Sunday led a rally organised in his hometown Nagpur by BJP workers to celebrate the Mahayuti's victory in recent Assembly polls. Fadnavis landed in Nagpur to a grand welcome from party workers and people PHOTO: PTI

Shah: Govt committed to ending Naxalism in Chhattisgarh by 2026

RAIPUR, 15 DEC

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday said the Centre and the Chhattisgarh government were committed to eradicate the menace of Naxalism from the state before 31 March, 2026.

When Chhattisgarh becomes free of Naxalism, the entire country will get rid of the menace, Shah said addressing the President's Police Colour Award function at the Police Parade Ground in Raipur.

The Chhattisgarh police have made a significant achievement in the fight against Naxalism in the last one year, he said.

Shah also hailed the Chhattisgarh government's rehabilitation policy for Naxalites and appealed to them to quit violence and join the mainstream.

"The state leadership, the chief minister, the home minister of the state have taken a pledge and the Government of India is also committed to your pledge. Together, we will completely eradicate Naxalism from Chhattisgarh before March 31, 2026. We all are committed to free Chhattisgarh from the clutches of Naxalism before March 31, 2026.," he said.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah PHOTO: PTI

> **I appeal to the Naxals, please come forward. Give up arms, surrender and join the mainstream. Your rehabilitation is our responsibility**
>
> -Amit Shah, Union Home Minister

When Chhattisgarh becomes Naxal free, the entire country will get rid of the menace, the Union minister said, adding it is the state police's resolve to end Naxalism.

For the first time in four decades, the death toll of civilians and security forces in Naxal violence has been brought down to less than 100, Shah said.

Amit Shah said Modi government is firm that there will be no tinkering with the current reservation system in the country as he accused Congress of reducing the quota for SCs, STs and OBCs by giving it to Muslims. *—PTI*

Cong: PM using Nehru to hide from failures

NEW DELHI,15 DEC

Congress hit out at Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday, alleging that defamation of Jawaharlal Nehru and minimum democratic governance was his model.

Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said PM Modi has an "obsession" with Nehru as he invokes the country's first prime minister to distract the nation's attention from his "own failures" and current challenges on which he maintains a "complete silence".

Congress attack on the prime minister came a day after Modi attacked the party during the debate on the 'Glorious 75-year journey of India's Constitution'.

"It was the famous French philosopher Voltaire who had first said that if God did not exist, it would be necessary to invent Him. For our self-anointed divinity -- if Nehru had not existed -- it would have been necessary to invent him," Ramesh said.

Congress leader asked what would the prime minister do without Nehru, for whom he has a pathological obsession. "Nehru is necessary to distract the nation's attention from his own failures. Nehru is necessary to divert the nation's attention from current challenges on which he maintains a complete silence," Ramesh said.

He also said that Nehru was necessary to deny the nation's many achievements before May 2014.

In another post on X, Ramesh said, "In his rant in the Lok Sabha yesterday, the PM attacked Nehru on the First Amendment to the Constitution of India -- which was carried out with effect from June 18th, 1951." *—PTI*

2026 ASSEMBLY POLLS

DMK's 200-seat goal, a daydream: Palaniswami

CHENNAI, 15 DEC

AIADMK chief Edappadi K Palaniswami on Sunday said the claim of DMK brass that its alliance would win 200 constituencies in the 2026 Assembly election was a daydream.

Addressing the party's general council and executive committee meeting here, Palaniswami, alleged all round corruption in the DMK regime, and said it had been facing protest of various sections including government employees, and transport workers.

Accusing the DMK regime as 'incompetent,' Palaniswami accused Stalin of having 'Kumbakarna's sleep' for not allegedly acting over 'red alerts' of Meteorological Department authorities in order to tackle the rain and flood situation in Villupuram, Cuddalore and other regions.

The objective of the red alert was to prompt state government to take suitable precautionary measures, he said. and added that it was not done by the chief minister and his government.

- Recently, Tamizhaga Vetri Kazhagam chief and actor Vijay had also accused the DMK of being arrongant

Ruling party leaders, Chief Minister M K Stalin, Deputy CM Udhayanidhi Stalin and party MP, Kanimozhi comment that 'they say with arrogance,' that the DMK-led coalition will win 200 seats out of 234 segments in the 2026 Assembly polls.

Recently, Tamizhaga Vetri Kazhagam chief and actor Vijay had accused the DMK of being arrongant. *—PTI*

Bengal minister's Muslim count remark draws flak

KOLKATA, 15 DEC

Under attack for his purported remarks about the low percentage of Muslims in West Bengal and India, Municipal Affairs and Urban Development Minister and TMC leader Firhad Hakim on Sunday asserted his strong belief in secular and patriotic values.

Hakim said on Sunday, "I am a diehard secular and patriotic Indian. No one can question my secular values and love for my country. Period."

Kartik Maharaj, a monk at Bharat Sevashram Sangha (BSS), alleged that instead of laying emphasis on education and economic uplift of Muslims, Hakim spoke about increasing their numbers, "which will aid and abet infiltration in the state". *—PTI*

AIYAR ON CONG'S 2014 LOSS

'Pranab should've been PM, Manmohan Prez'

NEW DELHI, 15 DEC

Veteran Congress leader Mani Shankar Aiyar says in his latest book that Pranab Mukherjee should have been given the reins of the UPA-II government and Manmohan Singh elevated as president when the Rashtrapati Bhavan presented an opening in 2012.

Had this step been taken, the UPA would not have gone into a "paralysis of governance", the 83-year-old Aiyar says in his book. He says the decision to retain Manmohan Singh as the PM and shift Pranab Mukherjee to the Rashtrapati Bhavan "doomed" any prospects the Congress might have had to form a UPA-III.

Aiyar puts forward these ideas in his forthcoming book A Maverick in Politics published by Juggernaut.

Veteran Congress leader Mani Shankar Aiyar PHOTO: PTI

In the book, Aiyar talks about his early days in politics, navigating through the Narasimha Rao years, his time as a minister in UPA I, his Rajya Sabha term and then his "decline...fade out...fall".

"In 2012, the prime minister (Manmohan Singh) underwent operations for multiple coronary bypasses. He never quite recovered physically. It slowed him down and this showed up in governance. As for the party, there was no official announcement about the Congress president's health when she took ill at about the same time as the PM," Aiyar says.

In both the offices there was stasis, a distinct absence of governance, while several crises were either not handled effectively or not handled at all, Aiyar says.

"Personally, I was of the view that Pranab Mukherjee should have been given the reins of the government and Dr Manmohan Singh elevated to President of India," he says. *—PTI*

Centre settling Rohingyas in Delhi, says Atishi

NEW DELHI, 15 DEC

Delhi Chief Minister Atishi wrote to Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday, accusing the BJP-led Centre of settling a large number of illegal Rohingya and Bangladeshi migrants in the national capital.

In the run-up to the Delhi Assembly polls due in February 2025, the ruling AAP and the BJP have been attacking each other over the issue.

With the AAP targeting Union Minister Hardeep Singh Puri over his tweets and claiming that settling these refugees in Delhi was a "conscious decision" of the BJP-led NDA government, the minister accused the AAP of indulging in "politics of diversion, false narratives and half-truths".

The BJP has already complained to the Election Commission about illegal Rohingyas and Bangladeshis registered as voters in Delhi "at the behest of AAP".

Atishi wrote in her letter to Shah, "This seems to be going on for the past several years. On August 17, 2022, Union Urban Development Minister Hardeep Puri published two tweets that clearly show that it is a 'conscious decision and policy' of the BJP government to settle these refugees in Delhi."

"From the post of Puri, it seems they were settled into EWS flats of Bakkarwala. These flats were meant for the poor people of Delhi. It appears that the rights and facilities meant for the people of Delhi are being given away to migrants," Atishi said. *—PTI*

1 dead as branch uprooted by jumbo falls on bike

KOCHI, 15 DEC

A female engineering student was killed and a youth sustained injuries when a huge palm tree branch fell on their motorcycle near Kothamangalam, Kerala on Saturday. Ann Mary CV, 21, a native of Thrissur, was riding pillion on the bike driven by her college mate Altaf Aboobacker, 21, around 6pm at Chembankuzhy near the Nagarampara forest office, and the branch of the tree uprooted by the elephant, fell on them, police said. Local forest officials who arrived at the scene rushed the duo to a private hospital in Kothamangalam. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

4 tribals killed as tractor-trolley overturns in MP

GWALIOR, 15 DEC

Four tribals were killed and 15 others injured when a tractor-trolley overturned in an attempt to save a buffalo in Madhya Pradesh's Gwalior district, police said on Sunday. The accident took place at around 10.30pm on Saturday in Ghatigaon area, an official said. As many as 31 people, belonging to the Saharia tribal community, had gone to a forest in Pai Kho village for collecting herbs. They were returning to the Kait village when the tractor-trolley overturned at Tilawali square while its driver was trying to avoid hitting a buffalo, Ghatigaon police station in-charge Jeevanlal Mahor said. Four persons, identified as Foolwati, 45, Ramdas, 46, Arun, 14, and Kasturi Bai, 65, were killed in the incident, the official said. Fifteen others were injured and undergoing treatment at a hospital in Gwalior, he added. *—PTI*

Pak drone with narcotics seized near IB in Jammu

JAMMU, 15 DEC

A Pakistani drone carrying nearly half a kg of high-grade narcotic substance was seized by the Border Security Force near the International Border here, officials said on Sunday. The quadcopter entered India from across the border and was seized from the Chinaz Border Outpost area in the Arnia sector late Saturday, they said. Confirming the recovery, a BSF spokesperson said a smuggling attempt was foiled by the alert troops with the successful interception of the Pakistani drone along with 495g of narcotic substance at 8.10pm on Saturday. "The relentless dedication and sharp vigil of BSF Jammu personnel have once again defeated the nefarious design of anti-national elements, showcasing their unwavering commitment to the nation's security," the official said in a statement. *—PTI*

HC grants bail to mentally ill murder convict

MUMBAI, 15 DEC

The Bombay High Court has granted bail to a 35-year-old man, convicted for killing his father, noting he is mentally unsound and suffering from schizophrenia. A division bench of Justices Bharati Dangre and Manjusha Deshpande, in its 12 December order, suspended the life sentence imposed on the man and granted him bail pending hearing of his appeal against conviction. The convict, who was well educated, had been diagnosed with schizophrenia the court noted. "The mental status examination clearly reflects that he continues to mutter to himself and suffers from mood swings and there is specific reference to his speech, sometimes being coherent and sometimes irrelevant and his judgment being impaired," the HC said. *—PTI*

Sambhal tense as bulldozers clear illegal structures

Anti-encroachment drive was carried out near the mosque

SAMBHAL, 15 DEC

Amid the ongoing tensions in Uttar Pradesh's Sambhal, the district administration on Sunday launched an anti-encroachment drive to clear public spaces of illegal structures.

According to Sambhal SDM Vandana Mishra, the operation aims to address encroachments in public areas and has been actively implemented in Chandauli for the past two months as well.

"Anti-encroachment drive is being run against encroachment on public places. This drive has also been run in Chandauli for the last two months... A drive is being run against electricity theft also in Sambhal..," she said.

Earlier on Saturday morning, an anti-encroachment drive was carried out in the Shahi Jama Masjid area.

Speaking to ANI, DM Rajender Pensiya said "In the morning, we came to check whether loudspeakers are causing unnecessary noise (pollution). It was seen that electricity theft is happening here in large numbers. Electricity theft is happening in about 15 to 20 houses and religious places. When we reached a mosque, we found 59 fans, a fridge, a washing machine and about 25 to 30 light points and the meter was found switched off. An intensive checking campaign is going on." Meanwhile, a temple in Uttar Pradesh's Sambhal which had been closed since 1978 has been reopened. The temple premises was cleaned and arrangements for electricity have been made on Sunday. Moreover, CCTV cameras have also been installed for security reasons.

Vishnu Sharan Rastogi, patron of Nagar Hindu Sabha, earlier claimed that the temple has been reopened after 1978. He said that the temple was closed because no priest was ready to live there.

Sambhal Circle Officer (SO) Anuj Kumar Chaudhary earlier said that they found a temple while inspecting information about encroachment. *—ANI*

Police personnel guard during opening of locks of an ancient temple, in Sambhal district, Saturday. **PHOTO: PTI**

Bahraich violence: Arms license of accused confiscated

BAHRAICH, 15 DEC

The district administration has cancelled and confiscated the arms licenses of three accused of murdering a man during communal violence in October in Maharajganj town of the district.

A 22-year-old man identified as Ram Gopal Mishra was shot dead and about half a dozen people were injured in stone pelting and firing as communal violence broke out during a Durga idol immersion procession in Bahraich on 13 October.

Superintendent of Police (SP) Vrinda Shukla told reporters on Saturday that Abdul Hameed along with his three sons Sarfaraz alias Rinku, Talib alias Sabloo and Faheem had allegedly shot dead Mishra.

During the investigation, Haji Masood Ahmed and Haji Mohammad Ahmed were also found involved in the incident. —PTI

COMPLY OR SHUT DOWN

Dairy farms and 'gaushalas' are urged to apply online through the Pollution Control Board portal without delay to avert potential penalties **PHOTO: PTI**

Delhi dairy farms asked to get pollution control consent

NEW DELHI, 15 DEC

The Delhi Pollution Control Committee has issued an urgent directive to cow shelters and dairy farms across the city, mandating them to secure pollution control consent within the next 15 days. Failure to comply may result in stringent legal actions.

In a public notice released on Sunday, the Committee specified that all 'gaushalas' and dairy farms housing 15 or more cattle, as well as all dairies situated within dairy colonies in Delhi, must apply for the necessary permits under the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974, and the Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981. This directive is in line with recent court orders and requires timely adherence.

The requirement follows the "Guidelines for Environmental Management of Dairy Farms and Gaushalas" issued by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), based on directives from the National Green Tribunal on 20 May 2020. These guidelines classify dairy farms and 'gaushalas' under the "Orange" and "Green" categories, respectively, concerning pollution control regulations.

Dairy farms and 'gaushalas' are urged to apply online through the Delhi Pollution Control Board portal without delay to avert potential penalties. *—PTI*

MUMBAI POLICE ARRESTS DAWOOD'S KEY AIDE IN DRUG CASE

MUMBAI, 15 DEC

Mumbai police have arrested Danish Merchant, also known as Danish Chikna, a close associate of gangster Dawood Ibrahim on Friday, in connection with a drug trafficking case. The arrest follows a month-long investigation that also led to the detention of Merchant's associate, Kader Ghulam Sheikh.

Merchant is suspected of running an illegal drug unit in Dongri linked to Dawood's operations. His arrest comes after police detained two individuals, Mohammad Ashikur Sahidur Rahman and Rehan Shakeel Ansari, last month. Rahman was apprehended on 8 November near Marine Lines Station with 144 grams of narcotics and revealed Ansari as his supplier. Ansari's arrest led to the seizure of 55 grams of drugs and implicated Merchant and another associate, Qadir Fanta.

After weeks of pursuit, both were captured in Dongri on 13 December. Merchant, the son of former Dawood aide Yusuf Chikna, has a history of drug-related arrests, including a 2021 bust in Rajasthan. He is linked to the 'Chinku Pathan module.' *—Agencies*

Danish Merchant **PHOTO: ANI**

Farmer leader on strike refuses medical aid

NEW DELHI, 15 DEC

The Punjab DGP Gaurav Yadav and Director of Home Affairs Mayank Yadav held a meeting with farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal to enquire about his health after a hunger strike at the Khanauri Border.

Speaking about the meeting, Dallewal had refused any medical aid and said that the government should rather think about the farmer's demands.

Further, Kohar asserted that discussion would be the only solution to the demands of the farmer's demands.

"The only solution to the demands of the farmers is a discussion. The farmers welcome a discussion with the government," Kohar said.

Punjab DGP Gaurav Yadav said that efforts were being made to ensure that the demands of the farmers were being resolved.

"We are trying to ensure that the demands of farmers be resolved and channels of dialogue between the government open. We appealed to Jagjit Singh Dallewal and other farmer leaders and medical facilities have been provided to Jagjit Singh Dallewal. We are trying to resolve the issue in coordination with them... Jagjit Singh Dallewal urged us to put forward our demands. We have followed the directions of the Supreme Court," the DGP further said.

Farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal has been on a hunger strike for the last 20 days at Khanauri Border of Haryana and Punjab for farmers' demand. *—ANI*

Punjab farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal, abed, on the seventeenth day of his fast-unto-death near the Khanauri Border, in Sangrur district, Punjab **PHOTO: PTI**

Jammu-Mendhar gets chopper service

JAMMU, 15 DEC

The Indian government has approved a new subsidised helicopter route that will connect Jammu, Poonch, and Mendhar, with an additional return option from Jammu to Mendhar, according to an official announcement.

This development comes after a proposal by Mohammad Aijaz Asad, Secretary of the Jammu and Kashmir Civil Aviation Department, aimed at improving direct access to the remote area of Mendhar from Jammu, the winter capital.

Subsidised helicopter services are already in operation across various locations in Jammu and Kashmir, including routes linking Kishtwar, Rajouri, Poonch, Doda, Bandipora, and Kupwara, among others. The Ministry of Home Affairs has now approved the new service, and the Union Territory has been advised to claim the subsidy within the designated budget.

Asad highlighted that the helicopter service aims to bolster connectivity in remote regions, particularly addressing accessibility issues faced by residents in Poonch and Mendhar. "The improved air service will benefit commuters and facilitate emergency patient evacuations," he stated.

He emphasised that the new route will be particularly advantageous during harsh winter months, offering quick transport solutions in challenging terrains, enhancing medical emergency access and potentially boosting border tourism in the future. *—PTI*

The new route will be particularly advantageous during harsh winter months offering quick transport solutions **PHOTO: PTI**

MODERATE RAINFALL EXPECTED

TN: Severe waterlogging in Thoothukudi due to heavy rains

THOOTHUKUDI, 15 DEC

Several parts of Thoothukudi and adjoining areas witnessed severe waterlogging on Sunday as heavy rains continued to lash parts of Tamil Nadu.

Visuals showed waterlogging in areas including Postal Telegram Colony, Rajiv Nagar, Rajagopal Nagar, Bharati Nagar, Amuda Nagar, KVK Nagar and Asoke Nagar of Thoothukudi.

Earlier on Friday, Thoothukudi and other districts received moderate to heavy rainfall, while Trichy received incessant rain.

According to the India Meteorological Department (IMD), heavy rain is likely to occur at isolated places over Tenkasi, Virudhunagar, Thoothukudi, Tirunelveli and Kanyakumari districts of Tamilnadu, Kerala, Lakshadweep area.

Light to moderate rain is likely to occur at one or two places over Tamilnadu, Puducherry and Karaikal areas on Monday, as per the IMD. *—ANI*

Railway tracks inundated with rain water at the railway station after heavy rainfall, in Thoothukudi, Tamil Nadu, on Sunday **PHOTO: PTI**

Experts urge POSH Act extension to political parties

NEW DELHI, 15 DEC

Legal experts and activists are demanding that political parties be brought under the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, commonly known as the POSH Act, to ensure gender equality and accountability. This follows the Supreme Court's dismissal of a plea urging political parties to comply with the 2013 law.

The bench of Justices Surya Kant and Manmohan directed the petitioner to approach the Election Commission of India for further action. Sonal Mattoo, a lawyer and director of NGO Helping Hands, emphasised the need for parties to focus on the spirit of the law rather than its technicalities, noting that existing disciplinary committees could also address inappropriate conduct towards women.

Meanwhile, prominent lawyer Shilpi Jain raised concerns over the independence of internal committees within political parties, suggesting that they may lack the authority to effectively tackle harassment issues.

Activists argue that addressing harassment in political spheres would enhance gender equality across society. Shabnam Hashmi, founder of NGO Anhad, highlighted the expectation for politicians to lead by example, while anti-rape activist Yogita Bhayana pointed out the contradiction of Parliament exempting itself from a law it enacted. Bhayana called for a robust enforcement framework for the POSH Act, stressing that political parties must protect women in informal roles. *—PTI*

FOR SCIENTIFIC STUDIES

ICMR sets up first diabetes biobank in Chennai

NEW DELHI, 15 DEC

A significant step in diabetes research has been taken with the establishment of India's first diabetes biobank in Chennai, launched by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) in collaboration with the Madras Diabetes Research Foundation (MDRF). This biobank is designed to gather, process, store, and distribute biological samples to facilitate scientific studies, contributing crucial insights into diabetes and its variations across the Indian population.

The biobank houses blood samples collected from two major ICMR-funded studies: the ICMR-INDIAB study, conducted nationally from 2008 to 2020, and the ongoing "Registry of people with diabetes in India at a young age at onset," initiated in 2006. A diverse range of samples from individuals with Type 1, Type 2, and gestational diabetes has been preserved, paving the way for future research.

Dr V Mohan, chairman of the MDRF, highlighted the biobank's potential to identify novel biomarkers for early diagnosis and develop personalised treatment strategies. The biobank will also support longitudinal studies, enhancing understanding of diabetes progression and complications.

The article published in the "Indian Journal of Medical Research" underscores the importance of biobanks in biomedical research while calling for public-private collaboration to optimally develop these resources.

With the UK Biobank as a global model, the ICMR-INDIAB study has already yielded alarming statistics, revealing that over 10 crore Indians are living with diabetes, emphasising an urgent need for widespread awareness and education about the condition.

This pioneering initiative is expected to significantly advance diabetes research in India and contribute to global efforts against the diabetes epidemic. *—PTI*

This biobank is designed to gather, process, store, and distribute biological samples **PHOTO: X**

FESTIVAL OF JOY IS HERE

A building illuminated with colourful lights ahead of Christmas, in Brisbane, Australia on Sunday
PHOTO: PTI

India must triple green funds for climate targets: Report

India needs to scale up investments by at least three times from Rs 425,300 crore to meet its climate targets, according to a new report by independent non-profit Climate Policy Initiative (CPI).

The mitigation sector is estimated to have attracted Rs 371,200 crore (USD 50 billion) on average per year in financial year 2021-22, a 20 per cent increase from 2019/20.

Adaptation-related sectors witnessed a nearly three-fold increase in investments in the same period, reaching Rs 1,09,200 crore (USD15 billion) per year in 2021-22.

"India's green finance landscape has made significant progress, but there is a long road ahead. This report highlights critical areas where action is needed to scale investments and bridge existing gaps," Vivek Sen, director, CPI India, said in a statement.

The Indian government estimated that the country needs Rs 16,250,000 crore (USD2.5 trillion) by 2030—amounting to Rs 1,100,000 crore annually (USD170 billion)—to achieve its Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC). NDCs are national climate action plans by each country under the Paris Agreement to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to help meet the global goal of limiting temperature rise to 1.5°C and adapt to the impacts of climate change.

India's cumulative adaptation-related investment needs are at least Rs 8,560,000 crore (USD1 trillion)—or Rs 5,733,000 crore (USD67 billion) per year from 2015 to 2030.

The CPI report, titled The Landscape of Green Finance in India, looked at both public and private sources of green finance in India. It also tracked domestic and international financial flows from their sources to end beneficiaries.

The report finds that around 83 per cent of India's green finance for mitigation was sourced domestically. Of the 83 per cent of domestic mitigation finance, the private sector contributed 66 per cent.

According to Centre, the country needs Rs 16,250,000 crore by 2030—amounting to Rs 1,100,000 crore annually to achieve its national climate action plans
PHOTO: PTI

- The report finds that around 83 per cent of India's green finance for mitigation was sourced domestically. Of the 83 per cent of domestic mitigation finance, the private sector contributed 66 per cent

International finance for mitigation increased to 17 per cent in 2021-22 from around 15 per cent in 2019-20. Of total international mitigation flows in 2021-22, contribution from private sources rose to 66 per cent up from 40 per cent in 2019-20. The remaining 34 per cent was traced back to public sources.

Among different sectors, clean energy attracted 47 per cent of the investment, with energy efficiency accounting 35 per cent, and clean transportation receiving 18 per cent of finances. All three sectors received the lion's share of funding domestically.

Unlike mitigation, most of adaptation financing was raised through public means. Domestic sources, largely from central and state government budgets, accounted for 98 per cent of finance for 2021-22. Funds for farm adaptation-related activities in agriculture from domestic private finance — private equity and venture capital funds — was negligible, less than 1 per cent.

Though international finance provides a small share, it has seen a growth of 19 per cent in 2021-22, compared to 2019/20. Of this, 92 per cent came from public international sources. The report warns that India's adaptation investments are likely to increase with climate change.

Within the adaptation sector, disaster risk management received the most funding, representing 42 per cent of the flows. It also saw a ten-fold increase from 2019-20, primarily driven by increasing government budgetary expenditure. This was followed by flood and cyclone mitigation and on-farm adaptation-related agricultural activities, receiving 32 per cent and 24 per cent of India's adaptation funds.

Within on-farm adaptation-related agricultural activities, crop insurance got 58 per cent of the total finance.

Public sources financed 99 per cent of on-farm adaptation activities. *—PTI*

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

SALAR سالار

Hello Kitty at 50: Japan's global cuteness icon

Hello Kitty doesn't look her age. And despite recently turning 50, she is showing no signs of slowing down.

In 2025, the Japanese character – worth around USD4 billion a year to the company that owns her – is due to star in a live-action movie. A new amusement park and resort are also planned.

Her 50th year has been celebrated at events in Japan, Singapore, the US and the UK, where she received a birthday message from King Charles at a state banquet in Buckingham Palace.

Quite the party then, for a character with two black-dotted eyes, no mouth and a yellow button nose. Designed in 1974 by Yuko Shimizu (who is not believed to have made much money from her creation), Hello Kitty first appeared on a clear, vinyl coin purse – and has since grown into a merchandise empire consisting of over 50,000 different items sold across 130 countries.

Hello Kitty's longevity is partly down to her inherent simplicity. In terms of design, she is composed of a few basic shapes, six short marks for whiskers, and a red bow. She is easy to recognise and cheap to reproduce. The character also epitomises "Kawaii", the Japanese term for cute. According to Professor Joshua Dale, a pioneer in the field of "cuteness studies", perceiving objects as cute triggers psychological instincts for care and protection.With Hello Kitty, children relate to the small, rounded character as being safe. Like others (see Winnie the Pooh, Mickey Mouse and many, many more), she provides a sense of innocence and comfort, which attracts fans from an early age – and continue into adulthood among those longing for nostalgia.

Hello Kitty also has an easily relatable storyline that resonates with consumers. According to her biography, Hello Kitty – full name Kitty White – is a cheerful little girl (so officially not actually a cat) who lives in the suburbs of London with her family. She is described as being "five apples tall" and "three apples" in weight. She apparently loves to bake cookies, and her other hobbies include travelling, listening to music and making new friends.

But away from the baking and friend-making, Hello Kitty has a very serious business side to her character. Sanrio, the Japanese firm that owns her, has employed some astute strategies to build and sustain such a successful brand.

Collaborating with other firms has been a big part of this. In 1996, Sanrio launched began its first collaboration with an electronics retail chain in Hong Kong. But things really developed three years later when the company joined up with McDonald's to offer a Hello Kitty meal deal.

The promotion started a craze in Hong Kong with similar success in Taiwan, Japan and Singapore – where the launch in 2000 led to massive queues and even fights. Customers reportedly threw away the hamburgers as they were only interested in the special edition wedding design toy set featuring Hello Kitty and her boyfriend Dear Daniel.

This year, a 50th anniversary collection of McDonald's toys in Singapore quickly sold out and were soon being resold online.

Elsewhere, the commercial success of Hello Kitty has been linked to licensed collaborations with big brands including Nike, Adidas, Crocs and the Italian fashion label Blumarine.

Hello Kitty products have progressed from stationery and stickers to microwave ovens, toasters and vacuum cleaners. She has appeared on Fender Stratocaster electric guitars and Swarovski jewellery.

And to add to the animated series and films, comics, books and video games, next year Hello Kitty will follow in Barbie's footsteps and appear in a (partly) live-action movie produced by Warner Bros. Yet despite all of these projects, Sanrio is diversifying away from the character. Hello Kitty now accounts for 60 per cent of the company's business in North America (it was 99 per cent in 2013) and just 30 per cent worldwide. Other characters are moving on to Kitty's patch.

According to the Sanrio 2024 character popularity ranking, Hello Kitty occupies fifth place, with Cinnamoroll (a dog with pink cheeks) sitting at the top. Other younger creations such as Gudetama (an apathetic egg yolk) and Aggretsuko (an angry red panda) mark a notable shift from Sanrio's emphasis on cute characters towards ones which reflect social concerns. Aggretsuko, for example, faces gender discrimination, social anxiety and a poor work-life balance. Gudetama reflects the struggles and aspirations of young people in Japan.

But as new characters come and go, Hello Kitty's familiar expression will no doubt remain unchanged, as it has for 50 years. An inscrutable gaze looking back on five decades of incredible commercial success. *—The Conversation*

Hello Kitty products have progressed from stationery and stickers to microwave ovens, toasters and vacuum cleaners
PHOTO: X/@HELLOKITTY

US aims to combat IS threat to stability in post-Assad Syria

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has wrapped up perhaps his last Middle East as America's top diplomat, with the aim of preventing Syria from spiralling out of control after the sudden ouster of President Bashar Assad.

Blinken was one of several senior US officials travelling across the region in the Biden administration's final weeks amid deep uncertainty in Washington and abroad over how Donald Trump will approach the Mideast when he takes office on 20 January, 2025.

Blinken held meetings Jordan, Turkey and Iraq with the aim of trying to shape the future of post-Assad Syria by forging consensus among regional partners and allies whose interests often diverge.

"We know that what happens inside of Syria can have powerful consequences well beyond its borders, from mass displacement to terrorism," he told reporters Saturday in Aqaba, Jordan. "And we know that we can't underestimate the challenges of this moment."

Charting a new course for Syria

While hopes remain for concluding a Gaza ceasefire by the time Biden leaves the White House, helping shape a new Syria may prove to be lower-hanging fruit.

Blinken left Washington just three days after Assad fled for Russia, a longtime ally. Blinken said his goal was to convince countries in the Mideast and elsewhere that they should commit to backing the U.S. view of how Syria should be run after decades of Assad family rule.

To that end, he said he had secured the backing of the 12 foreign ministers from the Arab League, Turkey and top officials from the European Union and United Nations who held an emergency meeting Saturday on Syria in the Jordanian port city of Aqaba.

They agreed that the new Syrian government should respect the rights of minorities and women, prevent terror groups from taking hold, ensure humanitarian aid reaches people in need, and secure and destroy any remaining Assad-era chemical weapons. Blinken has promised that the United States would recognise and support a new government that met those principles.

Seeking stability to deter the Islamic State group

Syria is riven by partisan and sectarian infighting that led in part to rise of the Islamic State militant group in the first place.

The US helped broker an agreement between the Turks and one of those Kurdish groups, the Syrian Defense Forces, after Assad's departure, although it's unclear how long that can last
PHOTO: PTI

Turkey, Syria's neighbour to the north, is deeply suspicious of Syrian and Iraqi Kurds. Turkey deems them terrorists, although some of those Kurds have proved to be key American partners in the fight to destroy IS.

The US helped broker an agreement between the Turks and one of those Kurdish groups, the Syrian Defense Forces, after Assad's departure, although it's unclear how long that can last.

"We have the urgency of now," Blinken said Saturday. "The urgency of now is to ensure that the success that we've had in ending the territorial caliphate of ISIS ... remains a critical mission," he said, using a different acronym for the group.

The SDF runs detention facilities holding some 10,000 fighters, and Blinken said its role is key because "this is a moment of instability in which ISIS will seek to regroup and take advantage of."

Just after Assad's downfall, the US struck about 75 IS targets in the Syrian desert in an effort to prevent the group from gaining a foothold. The US also has about 900 troops in Syria to battle the group.

Facing Trump's return to power

There are concerns in the region about how the incoming Trump administration will handle the Middle East, apart from deepening ties with Israel. Trump has demanded the immediate release of hostages in Gaza, threatening on social media that otherwise there would be "HELL TO PAY," and has urged the US not to get involved in Syria.

Nonetheless, current US officials believe the Republican is unlikely to abandon American military positions in Syria, as he had wanted to do during his first term. Their belief stems from the fact that Trump frequently takes credit for vanquishing IS by finishing the liberation of their territory that began during the Obama administration.

The threat of the possible return of IS would be too great for Trump risk, according to these officials. They say Iraq, which signed an agreement with the US in September under which the US-led anti-IS coalition will withdraw next year, is already hinting that conditions could force a change in that timetable. On a Gaza ceasefire and hostage release deal, Sullivan expressed cautious optimism that conditions were ripe for halting the long-running conflict before the end of the Biden administration's end. "I wouldn't be here now if I didn't think this thing was just waiting until after Jan. 20," he said this week. Sullivan also said there has been good cooperation with the incoming Trump administration, with widespread agreement between them.

Searching for missing Americans

The Biden administration has made it a priority to find Austin Tice, an American journalist believed held in Syria for more than a decade. Since Assad's ouster, the US has redoubled efforts to find Tice and return him home.

Blinken said Saturday that the US has been in direct contact with the rebels that ousted Assad, including about "the importance of helping find Austin Tice and bringing him home." Washington's top hostage negotiator, Roger Carstens, traveled to Lebanon this week in hopes of getting information on Tice. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

Mango clothing founder dies after fall from cliff

BARCELONA, 15 DEC

Isak Andic, the founder and owner of Mango, Spanish clothing retailer with nearly 2,800 stores worldwide, has died in a mountain accident, according to the company and police. The 71-year-old businessman slipped and fell more than 100 metres (328 feet) from a cliff while hiking with relatives in the Montserrat caves near Barcelona on Saturday, a police spokesperson said. Mango, a Barcelona-based company, has announced the unexpected death of its non-executive chairman and founder, Isak Andic. CEO Toni Ruiz expressed his deep regret for the loss and praised Andic's strategic vision, inspiring leadership, and commitment to values. Born in Istanbul, Andic moved to Catalonia in the 1960s and founded Mango in 1984. *—Agencies*

5 migrants dead, many missing in 4 Greek boat wrecks

ATHENS, 15 DEC

At least five migrants died, an unknown number were missing and more that 200 others rescued in Greece in multiple operations south of the island of Crete, the coast guard said Saturday. Four operations have been launched to rescue migrants from the Peloponnese region off the southern mainland of Greece. The ongoing operation involved 39 people being rescued and taken to Crete, while the other two operations off Gavdos involved 47 and 89 people respectivelyThe Greek coast guard and nine vessels, including coast guard ships, an Italian navy frigate, four merchant ships, and two helicopters, conducted extensive search and rescue missions to address the surge in migrant arrivals, believed to be driven by Middle East conflicts. *—PTI*

Pope departs on first papal visit to Corsica

AJACCIO, 15 DEC

Pope Francis' one-day visit to the French island of Corsica on Sunday, two days before his 88th birthday, puts a dual focus on the Mediterranean, highlighting local traditions of popular piety on the one hand and migrant deaths and wars on the other. Pope Francis will visit Corsica, the birthplace of Napoleon, for the first time, spending nine hours in Ajaccio. The island is known for its devout religious community, with 92 confraternities dedicated to charity and piety. Francis will address 400 attendees at the Conference on Popular Religiosity in the Mediterranean, discussing local religious traditions and visiting the 17th-century cathedral of Santa Maria Assunta. *—PTI*

5 Aus traffickers freed after 20 yrs in Indonesian jail

MELBOURNE, 15 DEC

Five Australians who had spent almost 20 years in Indonesian prisons for heroin trafficking returned to Australia on Sunday under a deal struck between the two governments, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said. Governments confirmed negotiations for Matthew Norman, Scott Rush, Martin Stephens, Si Yi Chen, and Michael Czugaj's return to Australia, but their return on Sunday remains secret. Australian Prime Minister Tony Albanese has confirmed that five Australian smugglers have returned to Australia as free citizens. They were part of a gang of nine smugglers arrested in Bali in 2005. The Bali Nine, led by two convicted ringleaders, were executed in 2015, sparking a diplomatic conflict between Australia and Indonesia. Renae Lawrence, the only woman in the group, was released in 2018. *—PTI*

Israel cuts off water, power in Syria as troops advance

Israel launched 61 missiles on Syria in under 5 hours

SYRIA, 15 DEC

Israeli tanks and armored vehicles have advanced into several towns in Syria's Quneitra province, destroying streets, water supply networks, and electricity infrastructure in the southwestern region.

Reports on Sunday revealed that many Quneitra residents ignored calls from the Israeli military to evacuate. In response, Israeli forces deliberately damaged vital infrastructure, cutting off water and power to newly occupied areas. In al-Hamidiyah, troops felled roadside trees and demolished power poles.

The escalation extended to airstrikes on the outskirts of Damascus early Sunday. Israeli media reported that the strikes targeted missile warehouses and launchers near Qastal in the Qalamoun area of Damascus' countryside. On Saturday, Israeli soldiers and air force units invaded an abandoned Syrian army command center in al-Hamidiyah, reportedly searching for weapons.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported that Israel launched 61 missiles at Syrian targets in under five hours late Saturday.

The offensive began on 8 December, following announcements by foreign-backed militants, led by Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), of the collapse of President Bashar al-Assad's government after a rapid two-week offensive. Israel's military operations have since intensified, aiming to seize more Syrian territory.

Israeli forces have occupied the summit of Jabal al-Shaykh, a strategic point providing extensive observation over Syria and Lebanon. The area falls within the UN-brokered 1974 disengagement agreement's buffer zone, which Israel has violated.

An aerial view of remaining buildings destroyed at the war at the Palestinian refugee camp of Yarmouk, outside Damascus, Syria **PHOTO: PTI**

- Israel has ordered troops to prepare for a prolonged stay on the Syrian side of Jabal al-Shaykh throughout the winter. The Israeli military's advances extended beyond the buffer zone

The Israeli minister of military affairs has ordered troops to prepare for a prolonged stay on the Syrian side of Jabal al-Shaykh throughout the winter. The Israeli military's advances extended beyond the buffer zone toward Damascus, accompanied by nearly 500 airstrikes on Syria. The regime claims to have destroyed 90 per cent of Syria's surface-to-air missile systems and the country's naval assets during the campaign. *—Agencies*

BLINKEN CONFIRMS US IS IN TOUCH WITH SYRIAN REBELS

WASHINGTON DC, 15 DEC

United States Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Saturday said his country had made "direct contact" with Syria's victorious Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) rebels, as western and Arab states along with Turkey jointly voiced support for a united, peaceful Syria.

The US secretary of state's comment is despite Washington having designated the HTS rebels as terrorists in 2018.

Blinken and other diplomats held talks on Syria in Aqaba, Jordan, on Saturday. "We've been in contact with HTS and with other parties," Blinken said, without specifying how the contact took place.

Turkey announced it had reopened its embassy in Damascus, nearly a week after the Islamist-led rebels toppled Bashar al-Assad's regime, and 12 years after the Turkish diplomatic mission was closed early in Syria's civil war.

Turkey has been a major player in Syria's conflict, holding considerable sway in the north-west, financing armed groups there and maintaining a working relationship with HTS, which spearheaded the offensive that toppled Assad. In a joint statement, diplomats from the US, Turkey, the EU and Arab countries "affirmed the full support to the Syrian people at this critical point in their history to build a more hopeful, secure and peaceful future". *—Agencies*

MARTIAL LAW ROW

South Korea's Yoon's powers have been suspended until the court decides whether to remove him from office or reinstate him **PHOTO: PTI**

South Korea seeks stability; Biden calls alliance 'linchpin'

SEOUL, 15 DEC

South Korea's opposition leader on Sunday urged the Constitutional Court to rule swiftly on a bid to remove President Yoon Suk Yeol from office, a day after parliament voted to impeach him over a short-lived attempt to impose martial law.

Lee Jae-myung, the leader of the opposition Democratic Party, told reporters Sunday that a swift ruling is the only way to minimize national chaos.

Yoon's powers have been suspended until the court decides whether to remove him from office or reinstate him. If Yoon is dismissed, a national election to choose his successor must be held within 60 days. Lee, who has led a fierce political offensive against Yoon's embattled government, is seen as the frontrunner to replace him.

The court will meet to begin considering the case on Monday, and has up to 180 days to rule. In the case of parliamentary impeachments of past presidents – Roh Moo-hyun in 2004 and Park Geun-hye in 2016, the court spent 63 days and 91 days before determining to reinstate Roh and dismiss Park, respectively.

Lee Jae-myung **PHOTO: PTI**

Meanwhile, US President Joe Biden on Sunday called the US alliance with South Korea a "linchpin for peace and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region" after a call on Saturday with Han Duck-soo, the prime minister who has become the acting president while a constitutional court deliberates over whether to permanently remove Yoon from office. Prime Minister Han Duck-soo, the country's No. 2 official, took over presidential powers later Saturday. Han was appointed by Yoon, whose government has struggled to pass legislation in the opposition-controlled parliament. Lee also proposed the creation of a national council where the government and the National Assembly would work together to stabilise state affairs. *—Agencies*

'LIABLE FOR RAPE' REMARK

ABC News settles with Trump for $15M

WASHINGTON DC, 15 DEC

ABC News on Sunday agreed to pay USD15m to settle a defamation suit filed by US president-elect Donald Trump over an inaccurate claim by the United States-based network's anchor.

The lawsuit stemmed from on-air comments made by anchor George Stephanopoulos that Trump had been "found liable for raping" writer E Jean Carroll.

The network and the anchor also agreed to offer public apologies for the comments during a live This Week interview with Representative Nancy Mace, according to documents filed on Saturday.

The terms of the settlement require ABC News to make a $15m donation to a fund dedicated to "a presidential foundation and museum" for Trump. The broadcaster will pay an additional USD1million in lawyer fees, the documents said. Trump sued ABC and Stephanopoulos in federal court in Miami days after the network aired the segment, in which the long-time Good Morning America anchor and This Week host repeatedly misstated the verdicts in Carroll's two civil lawsuits against Trump.

Trump had been found liable for sexual abuse – a different transgression from rape under New York law – in a 2023 case filed by the writer.

Donald Trump **PHOTO: PTI**

- In the first of the lawsuits to go to trial, Trump was found liable last year for sexually abusing and defaming Carroll, a former advice columnist

In the first of the lawsuits to go to trial, Trump was found liable last year for sexually abusing and defaming Carroll, a former advice columnist. A jury ordered him to pay her USD5million. In January, at a second trial in federal court in Manhattan, Trump was found liable on additional defamation claims and ordered to pay Carroll USD 83.3million.

Trump is appealing both verdicts. *—Agencies*

Richard Grenell to serve as US special missions envoy

WEST PALM BEACH, 15 DEC

US president-elect Donald Trump announced that he's picked longtime foreign policy adviser Richard Grenell to serve as an envoy for special missions, tasking him with helping the incoming administration deal with some of the toughest foreign policy challenges.

Grenell served as ambassador to Germany during Trump's first administration, special presidential envoy for Serbia and Kosovo peace negotiations, and did a stint as acting director of national intelligence.

He was also a contender to serve as secretary of state, but Trump opted to nominate Florida Sen. Marco Rubio.

Grenell during Trump's first term developed a reputation for employing a sometimes contentious approach to diplomacy that rankled allies and the foreign policy establishment in Washington. But his style was appreciated by the president-elect who sees value in blunt talk with allies.

Grenell remained close to Trump after he left office in 2021, serving at times as a key adviser on foreign policy.

Grenell has advocated for a peace deal that would preserve Ukraine's territory while still allowing for "autonomous regions" where Russia could remain in control. *—PTI*

Ex-PM Hasina involved in enforced disappearances: B'desh Commission

DHAKA, 15 DEC

An inquiry commission set up by the interim government in Bangladesh has said that it found evidence implicating deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina and top-ranking military and police officials from her regime in alleged incidents of enforced disappearance – in other words, extrajudicial killings.

The five-member Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances (CIED) submitted an interim report titled Unfolding The Truth to Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus on Saturday.

The commission estimated that there would be more than 3,500 enforced disappearances.

"The commission has found evidence of former prime minister Sheikh Hasina's involvement as the instructor in the incidents of enforced disappearance," the press wing of the office of Chief Adviser said in a statement on Saturday night.

Sheikh Hasina **PHOTO: X**

It said Hasina's defence adviser Major General (retd) Tarique Ahmed Siddique, former director general of the National Telecommunication Monitoring Centre and sacked Major General Ziaul Ahsan, senior police officers Monirul Islam and Mohammad Harun-Or-Rashid and several other senior officials were involved in those incidents.

- The ex-military and police officers are on the run, most of them believed to be abroad, since the ouster of Hasina's Awami League regime on 5 August.

The ex-military and police officers are on the run, most of them believed to be abroad, since the ouster of Hasina's Awami League regime on 5 August. *—PTI*

CHINESE 'SPY' LINKED TO PRINCE ANDREW MET FORMER PMs

LONDON, 15 DEC

The scandal surrounding an alleged Chinese spy who managed to gain access to Buckingham Palace as a "close confidant" of Prince Andrew, the younger brother of King Charles III, intensified on Sunday as it emerged that he also met former prime ministers David Cameron and Theresa May.

While Cameron and May distanced themselves from any knowledge of his espionage links, the row involving the businessman, known only as "H6" for legal reasons, continues to dominate the headlines after a tribunal judge noted that he had an "unusual" degree of trust from the senior royal.

Andrew, said that he had "ceased all contact" with the alleged spy.

Meanwhile, a spokesperson for Theresa May said "as such, she doesn't remember when or where this particular photograph was taken or the man in question".

The revelations come after it emerged earlier this week that H6 had been barred from entering the UK due to national security risks. *—PTI*

ISLAMIC LAW ROW

Iranian singer held for performing without hijab

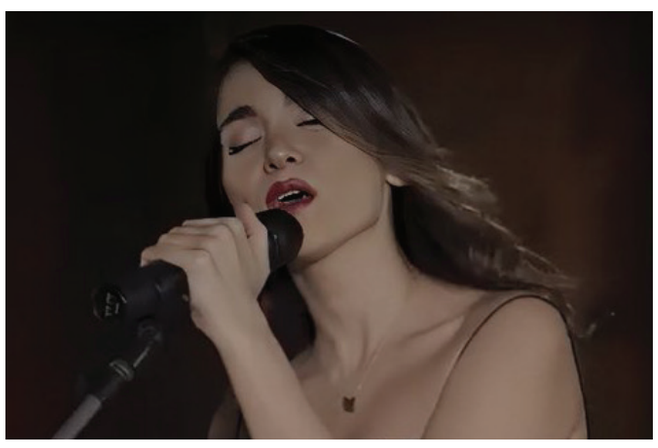
DUBAI, 15 DEC

Iranian authorities have arrested a female singer who performed a virtual concert on YouTube, a lawyer said.

Milad Panahipour, an Iranian lawyer, said Parastoo Ahmady, 27, was arrested in Sari City, capital of the northern province of Mazandaran, on Saturday.

On Thursday, the judiciary had filed a case regarding Ahmady's concert performance, in which she performed wearing a long black sleeveless and collarless dress, but no hijab. She was accompanied by four male musicians.

Ahmady had posted her concert on YouTube the day before, saying: "I am Parastoo, a girl who wants to sing for the people I love. This is a right I could not ignore; singing for the land I love passionately."



The singer Parastoo Ahmady in her virtual concert was accompanied by four male musicians **PHOTO: X @BOBBYZAVA**

The online concert has been viewed more than 1.4 million times. Panahipour said, "Unfortunately, we do not know the charges against Ms Ahmady, who arrested her, or her place of detention, but we will follow up on the matter through legal authorities."

He also said two musicians in Ahmady's band — Soheil Faghih Nasiri and Ehsan Beiraghdar — were arrested in Tehran on Saturday.

Following the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979, women were banned at first from singing altogether, then from singing or dancing solo before mixed-gender audiences. Female vocalists could perform for male audiences only as a part of a chorus. But they are allowed to sing in a hall for female-only audiences.

Also based on Iranian and Islamic law, women are not allowed to appear without a hijab in front of men who are not related. *—PTI*

At least 11 dead in France as Cyclone Chido strikes

CAPE TOWN, 15 DEC

At least 11 people have died after Cyclone Chido caused devastating damage in the French territory of Mayotte in the Indian Ocean, France's Interior Ministry said Sunday.

The ministry said it was proving difficult to get a precise tally of the dead and injured amid fears the death toll will increase. A hospital in Mayotte reported that nine people were in critical condition in the hospital and 246 others were injured.

The tropical cyclone blew through the southeastern Indian Ocean, also affecting Comoros and Madagascar. Mayotte was directly in the path of the cyclone and suffered extensive damage on Saturday, officials said. The prefect of Mayotte said it was the worst cyclone to hit Mayotte in 90 years.

PHOTO: X @NAMINAKN

Chido has now made landfall in Mozambique on the African mainland, where emergency officials had warned that 2.5 million people could be impacted in two northern provinces. *—PTI*

Tata Steel eyes steady ore supply with NMDC, OMC

NEW DELHI, 15 DEC

Tata Steel has initiated discussions with state-run miners NMDC and Odisha Mining Corporation (OMC) to secure future iron ore supplies as the company ramps up its domestic steel manufacturing capacity. Tata Steel will also operationalise two new iron mines namely Kalamang West and Gandalpada as part of its strategy to ensure raw material security, the company's Vice President, Raw Material, DB Sundara Ramam told PTI. At present, Tata Steel meets its entire demand for iron ore, from six iron ore mines operated by company in Odisha and Jharkhand. . *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

Auto Expo 2024 sets participation record: SIAM

NEW DELHI, 15 DEC

The upcoming edition of Auto Expo will see participation of 34 vehicle manufacturers, the largest number of participants till date, since the first edition of the marquee event in 1986. The Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers (SIAM) would be organising the 17th edition of Auto Expo, 'The Motor Show', under the aegis of the Bharat Mobility Global Expo 2025 from January 17-22 at Bharat Mandapam, in partnership with ACMA and CII. "Around 34 vehicle manufacturers would be participating at the exhibition and showcasing technologies with respect to multiple powertrains," SIAM Director General Rajesh Menon told PTI. It is the highest-ever participation in the history of the event so far, he added.. *—PTI*

Coal imports up 4% at 162 MT in Apr-Oct period

NEW DELHI, 15 DEC

The country's coal import rose by 4.2 per cent to 162.45 million tonnes (MT) in the April-October period of the current financial year compared to 155.87 MT in the year-ago period. Coal imports in October dropped by 14.4 per cent to 21.84 MT compared to 25.54 MT in the corresponding month of the previous fiscal, according to data compiled by mjunction services, a B2B e-commerce platform. Of the total imports in October, non-coking coal imports stood at 13.49 MT against 18.82 MT imported in October last fiscal. Coking coal imports stood at 4.45 MT, against 4.31 MT imported in October last financial year. In September, non-coking coal imports were 13.24 MT and coking coal at 3.39 MT. *—PTI*

NBCC Ltd eyes ₹1 lakh cr order book by March

NEW DELHI, 15 DEC

State-owned NBCC Ltd is targeting to reach Rs 1 lakh crore of consolidated order book by March next year from the current Rs 84,400 crore as the company looks to expand business across India. NBCC (India) Ltd is into Project Management Consultancy (PMC), Engineering, Procurement and Construction (EPC) and real estate businesses. So far during this fiscal year, the company has secured work orders worth more than Rs 28,000 crore at a consolidated level, the CMD said. According to a transcript of discussion with investors, he said the total order book at a consolidated level is Rs 84,400 crore, of which NBCC's share is about Rs 70,400 crore. The remaining is the order book of its three subsidiaries, including HSCL. On execution timeline, he said the redevelopment projects take 4-5 years, whereas normal PMC takes only 1.5-2 years. NBCC's total income rose to Rs 2,525.95 crore during the second quarter of this fiscal year from Rs 2,134.36 crore in period of preceding year. *—PTI*

FPIs infuse ₹22,766 crore in first two weeks of Dec

FPI investment has reached at ₹7,747 crore in 2024 so far

NEW DELHI, 15 DEC

Foreign investors have made a strong comeback to Indian equities with a net investment of Rs 22,766 crore in the first two weeks of December driven by expectations of rate cut by the US Federal Reserve.

This revival follows significant outflows in the preceding months, with Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) pulling out a net Rs 21,612 crore in November and a massive Rs 94,017 crore in October -- the worst monthly outflow on record.

Interestingly, September had marked a nine-month high for FPI inflows, with a net investment of Rs 57,724 crore, highlighting the volatility in foreign investment trends.

With the latest inflow, FPI investment has reached at Rs 7,747 crore in 2024 so far, data with the depositories showed.

September had marked a nine-month high for FPI inflows PHOTO: X

According to the data with the depositories, FPIs have made a net investment of Rs 22,766 crore in this month (till 13 December). This was driven by expectations of a US Federal Reserve rate cut.

Additionally, India's Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation dropped to 5.48 per cent in November from 6.21 per cent in October, enhancing investor confidence and raising hopes for potential monetary policy easing by the RBI.

Even though FPIs have turned buyers in December, they have been large sellers too on certain days. This indicates that at higher levels, they may again turn sellers since Indian valuations continue to be relatively high compared to other markets, VK Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist, Geojit Financial Services, said.

The rising dollar is another concern which might prompt FPIs to sell at higher levels, he added. On the other hand, FPIs invested Rs 4,814 crore in the debt general limit and pulled out Rs 666 crore from the debt Voluntary Retention Route (VRR) during period under review. So far, FPIs have invested Rs 1.1 lakh crore in debt market. *—PTI*

India's Russian crude oil imports dip in November

NEW DELHI, 15 DEC

India's imports of Russian crude oil fell significantly in November, reaching their lowest level since June 2022, according to a report from the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air (CREA). Despite this drop, Russia remains the largest supplier of oil to India, accounting for nearly 40 per cent of its total imports, a sharp rise since the onset of the Ukraine invasion in February 2022.

CREA reported that Indian imports of Russian crude decreased by a staggering 55 per cent in November. The decline coincided with a wider 11 per cent drop in India's overall crude oil imports. While Russia has retained its status as India's primary oil supplier, Iraq and Saudi Arabia follow in second and third places, respectively.

Chinese purchases of Russian crude comprise 47 per cent of exports, with India holding a 37 per cent share. The report also highlighted a significant 17 per cent increase in the discount on Russia's Urals crude oil, making it priced at an average of USD 6.01 per barrel below Brent crude.

Chinese purchases of Russian crude comprise 47 per cent of exports, with India holding a 37 per cent share PHOTO: PIXABAY

In terms of fossil fuel imports, India has fallen to third place among Russian buyers, contributing EUR 2.1 billion to Moscow's monthly export earnings in November—a decline of 22 per cent from October.

The impact of price caps and embargoes imposed by the G7 and EU has been profound, with CREA estimating that Russia lost EUR 14.6 billion in revenues from Urals crude exports since the sanctions were introduced. Despite the challenges, the report indicates that Russia has a network of 'shadow' tankers to evade restrictions. *—PTI*

NCLAT rejects plea on Golden Jubilee Hotels sale

NEW DELHI, 15 DEC

In a significant ruling, the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) has dismissed EIH Ltd's challenge to an earlier order by the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) that approved the sale of Hyderabad's Golden Jubilee Hotels to Singapore-based BREP Asia II Indian Holding Co II (NQ) PTE.

The NCLAT affirmed the NCLT's decision, citing that the majority vote from the Committee of Creditors (CoC) regarding the sale is not subject to judicial scrutiny. This ruling underscores the commercial discretion of the CoC and limits the scope for judicial intervention.

EIH, the flagship company of The Oberoi Group, which had a 16 per cent stake in Golden Jubilee Hotels, argued that it should not be deemed a promoter, and thus ineligible under Section 29A of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC). *—PTI*

IN MKT VALUATION

5 of top-10 firms add ₹1.13L crore

PHOTO:ANI

NEW DELHI, 15 DEC

Five of the 10 most valued firms added Rs 1,13,117.17 crore to their total market valuation last week with Bharti Airtel stealing the show.

While Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), HDFC Bank, Bharti Airtel, ICICI Bank and Infosys were the gainers, Reliance Industries, State Bank of India, Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC), ITC and Hindustan Unilever took a hit in their valuations.

Last week, BSE benchmark gained 623.07 points or 0.76 per cent and Nifty advanced 90.5 points or 0.36 per cent.

The market valuation of Bharti Airtel surged by Rs 47,836.6 to Rs 9,57,842.40 crore.

Infosys added Rs 31,826.97 crore to its valuation at Rs 8,30,387.10 crore.

HDFC Bank's valuation rose by Rs 11,887.78 crore to Rs 14,31,158.06 crore and that of ICICI Bank increased by Rs 11,760.8 to Rs 9,49,306.37 crore.

The market capitalisation (mcap) of TCS climbed Rs 9,805.02 to Rs 16,18,587.63 crore.

However, the mcap of Reliance Industries declined by Rs 52,031.98 crore to Rs 17,23,144.70 crore.

The valuation of LIC tumbled Rs 32,067.73 crore to Rs 5,89,869.29 crore and that of Hindustan Unilever slumped Rs 22,250.63 crore to Rs 5,61,423.08 crore.

The mcap of State Bank of India dropped Rs 2,052.66 crore to Rs 7,69,034.51 crore and that of ITC by Rs 1,376.19 crore to Rs 5,88,195.82 crore. *—PTI*

Mkts to be guided by US Fed rate

New Delhi, 15 DEC

The US Fed interest rate decision, inflation data and FIIs are the key factors that are expected to drive stock markets this week, analysts said. Also, global trends will also be tracked by investors for further cues, they added. The flow of foreign and domestic institutional investments will also be a key driver, he said. *—PTI*

Aurobindo, Glenmark recall medicines in US

NEW DELHI, 15 DEC

Drug makers Aurobindo Pharma, Glenmark and Zydus are recalling products in the US market due to manufacturing issues, according to the US health regulator.

As per the latest Enforcement Report of US Food and Drug Administration (USFDA), Aurobindo Pharma USA Inc, a subsidiary of Hyderabad-based drug maker, is recalling over 1 lakh bottles of Cinacalcet tablets in multiple strengths.

The New Jersey-based firm is recalling the product due to "GMP Deviations: Presence of N-nitroso Cinacalcet impurity above FDA recommended interim limit," the US health regulator said.

Similarly, a US-based subsidiary of Glenmark Pharmaceuticals is recalling around 90,000 bottles of Diltiazem Hydrochloride extended-release capsules (multiple strengths) in the US market. *—PTI*

Airlines are price takers, have no influence on prices: IATA

GENEVA, 15 DEC

- With airlines expected to post a net profit of merely USD 1.8 per passenger by 2025, he noted need for revenue diversification

Airlines are faced with significant challenges in pricing, with little control over their operational costs, according to Marie Owens Thomsen, Chief Economist at IATA. In a recent interview, Thomsen highlighted the complexities airlines face in diversifying revenue streams amid slim profit margins and weak balance sheets.

She explained that airlines function as "price takers," unable to influence the prices of essential resources such as aircraft and jet fuel. This situation is exacerbated by the competitive landscape, where consumers can easily compare fares across multiple airlines. As a result, airlines struggle to maintain profitability even in a booming market, like India, where air traffic demand is high.

Thomsen pointed out that while airfares have increased, they have not kept pace with overall inflation, particularly when compared to rising fuel costs, which now account for around 30 per cent of operating expenses. A recent IATA study underscored that air ticket prices have lagged behind the Consumer Price Index over the past decade.

With airlines expected to post a net profit of merely USD 1.8 per passenger by 2025, Thomsen noted the pressing need for revenue diversification while confronting the realities of high operational costs and regulatory fees. IATA represents approximately 340 airlines globally, accounting for over 80 per cent of air traffic. *—PTI*

UPL-SAS sees tech, climate solutions as growth drivers post $200M investment

NEW DELHI, 15 DEC

UPL-Sustainable AgriSolutions (UPL-SAS) is leading a groundbreaking shift in Indian agriculture by utilising technology and digital innovations to tackle the sector's intricate challenges, according to CEO Ashish Dobhal. With agriculture covering 400 million acres and involving 130 million farmers—80 to 85 per cent of whom are smallholders—the company is evolving from merely selling crop protection products to delivering comprehensive farming solutions.

"Each state has distinct nuances in cropping patterns and farming culture," Dobhal highlighted, noting the complexity of the Indian agricultural landscape. He expressed confidence that "the worst of the industry downturn is behind us."

UPL Ltd is implementing a multi-faceted strategy focused on developing solutions for emerging pest issues PHOTO: X

UPL-SAS, a subsidiary of UPL Ltd, is implementing a multi-faceted strategy focused on developing solutions for emerging pest issues, advancing climate-smart technologies, investing in bioinsecticides, and utilising artificial intelligence for tailored market strategies. The recent USD 200 million investment from entities such as the Abu Dhabi Investment Authority will fuel innovation aimed at addressing challenges like climate change and water scarcity.

The Nurture Digital platform is a pivotal part of UPL's strategy, offering immediate access to crop advisory, insurance, and machinery information. "In a small landholding ecosystem, technology is vital," Dobhal asserted.

As the company champions a collaborative approach, Dobhal emphasised the need for sustainable agricultural practices to enhance food security. "This industry continues to grow," he concluded, underscoring the significance of innovation in addressing global food challenges. *—PTI*

'FOCUS ON LOCAL SUPPLY'

Mexico, Canada, ASEAN benefit more from US-China trade war than India: GTRI

NEW DELHI, 15 DEC

A recent report by the economic think tank GTRI reveals that India has not capitalised on the opportunities presented by the US-China trade war as successfully as Mexico, Canada, and the ten-nation ASEAN bloc. While these countries collectively accounted for 57 per cent of the increase in US imports during the trade conflict, India's export growth has been relatively modest.

The report indicates that India must focus on strengthening local supply chains and producing critical intermediates to reduce its dependency on China. Improvements in cost efficiency and the ease of doing business are also essential to enhance the competitiveness of domestic industries and boost exports to the US.

The report indicates that India must focus on strengthening local supply chains and producing critical intermediates PHOTO: X

With Donald Trump potentially returning to the presidency, the Indian industry could find new prospects, as he is expected to target additional tariffs at Mexico, Canada, China, and others. Between 2017 and 2023, Mexico experienced the most significant gains, increasing exports to the US by USD 164.3 billion. Canada followed closely with a USD 124 billion rise, while India ranked sixth with a USD 36.8 billion increase, primarily in electronics, pharmaceuticals, and engineering goods.

Despite the gains, GTRI emphasised the need for India to elevate local value addition in exports, citing reliance on imported inputs such as smartphone components and pharmaceutical raw materials. *—PTI*

India pushes WTO on high seas fishing subsidies

NEW DELHI, 15 DEC

India has pitched at the WTO for stricter regulations on subsidies granted by countries that are engaged in high seas fishing activities, an official said.

Highlighting the stark disparity, an Indian document submitted at the World Trade Organization (WTO) has noted that it provides a modest USD 35 per fisher annually, compared to subsidies as high as USD 76,000 per fisher per year in some European nations.

India also suggested that historical subsidisers should seek permission of the Committee on Fisheries Subsidies for grant of subsidies in future.

The country has made these remarks in the meetings of the Negotiating Group on Rules (Fisheries subsidies), which are going on in Geneva.

The General Council is the WTO's highest-level decision-making body in Geneva, meeting regularly to carry out the functions of the WTO. It has representatives (usually ambassadors or equivalent) from all member governments and has the authority to act on behalf of Ministes.

India has also called for adopting a 'per capita distribution of subsidies' criteria to address concerns over overfishing and capacity under the WTO framework, according to the document. Countries like Norway, China, Japan and the US undertake distant water fishing and provide subsidies. *—PTI*

PHOTO:AP

Bundesliga teams 'finish' game after goalkeeper hit

BERLIN, 15 DEC

Bochum's goalkeeper was struck on the head by an object apparently thrown from the stands at Union Berlin and both Bundesliga teams left the field. When the game resumed, they ran down the clock without trying to score. Patrick Drewes was preparing to take a goal kick at 1–1 in added time when he was hit by an object with a similar size and shape to a cigarette lighter. He sat down and was given medical treatment. The referee suspended the game and led both teams off the field. Nearly half an hour later, the game resumed and Drewes was replaced by striker Philipp Hofmann. Both teams agreed to not try to score. Players passed the ball around the field, waiting for the referee to declare the game over. *—PTI*

US, Germany, Aus & England to take part in Kho-Kho WC

NEW DELHI, 15 DEC

US, England, Germany, Australia, New Zealand and Brazil are among the teams that have confirmed their participation in the inaugural Kho Kho World Cup, which India is hosting from 13 to 19 January. As many as 24 countries have already confirmed their participation in the weeklong event at the Indira Gandhi Indoor Stadium in the national capital and at the Noida Indoor Stadium. The event will be held on league-cum-knockout format, said Sudhanshu Mittal, the president of Kho Kho Fedration of India and chairman of the organising committee. The tournament will be held for both men and women. Among Asian countries, Indonesia will send only their women's team. *—PTI*

Head makes record with King Pair & century

BRISBANE, 15 DEC

India's bane and Australia's boon, Travis Head, became the first batter to bag a King Pair and century at a venue in the same calendar year. The Gabba, considered Australia's fortress, was not Head's favourite playground when he turned up to face the West Indies in the day-night Test earlier this year. He was dismissed for a golden duck twice, a King Pair, at The Gabba before stepping into the venue once again on Sunday in the third Test of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy against India. However, he dictated the terms of the play with his usual swagger and pummelled Indian bowlers according to his will. Following his 152-run blitzkrieg, Head became the first batter to bag a King Pair and a century at the same venue and in the same calendar year. *—PTI*

BGT: Head, Smith's ton put Australia ahead

Australia reached a commanding 405 for 7 at stumps on Day 2 of 3rd Test against India

BRISBANE, 15 DEC

Travis Head put an insipid Indian bowling attack to sword for his second successive hundred while veteran Steve Smith wore the opposition down with a statement century to put Australia in a favourable position on day two of the third Test here on Sunday.

Australia reached a commanding 405 for 7 at stumps courtesy, a 241-run stand between Head (152 off 160) and Smith (101 off 190) for the fourth wicket after the visitors put them in a spot of bother at 75 for three in the morning.

The Indian bowlers, who impressed in the first session, lost their way to allow Head and Co to dominate the proceedings.

Jasprit Bumrah (5/72), who came up with welcome wickets both in the morning and towards the end of play, was once again the stand out bowler for the visitors. It was his second five-wicket haul of the series and the overall tally stands at 17.

Leaving Bumrah's brilliance aside, India's on-field tactics left a lot to be desired as Head played yet another game changing knock.

Head, since his century in WTC final at the Oval in 2023 has been India's nemesis with another classic ton in ODI World Cup final and two more in the current series. No player in last one year has scored more runs against India across formats.

Smith's hundred too was of high quality. He preferred to grind it out in the first half of his innings before gaining the confidence to go for his strokes. He changed his stance for the third time in as many Tests by reverting to his exaggerated shuffle across the stumps and that ended up paying rich dividends. The hands were moving well, which has always been integral to his game.

One bowler, who should consider himself unlucky is Akash Deep who repeatedly beat Smith's outside edge without much success.

Rain is predicted for the next three days and is likely to impact the outcome of the game controlled by Australia at the moment. *—PTI*

Travis Head put an insipid Indian bowling attack to sword for his second successive hundred PHOTO: ANI

> **Jasprit comes on, I was a bit lucky with a few good spells. He goes for the base of the stumps early. I think it's about reacting. He has a good bouncer. He's got brilliant wicket-taking balls**
>
> -Travis Head

Bumrah overtakes Kapil Dev with fifer

Pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah continued his rampaging run in international cricket in 2024, outdoing legendary all-rounder Kapil Dev in two important bowling parameters, further establishing his case as perhaps India's best pacer in overseas conditions. During the day two of third Test against Australia at Brisbane, Bumrah was the lone warrior for India, taking wickets as Steve Smith and Travis Head piled on runs. Removing both centurions, he ended day with figures of 5/72 in 25 overs. *—ANI*

Morkel: India must improve with old ball

BRISBANE, 15 DEC

Bowling coach Morne Morkel on Sunday accepted that Indian bowlers failed to execute plans against Australian century-maker Travis Head and exhorted them to tidy up their act with the old ball between overs 50 and 80.

Head and fellow centurion Steve Smith helped the hosts to clobber 171 runs in 31 overs in the third session on the second day of the third Test here, adding to a wicketless post-lunch segment.

Australia closed the day at a highly satisfying 405 for seven.

"First of all, we can say he's (Head) in pretty good form. But I think for us with the ball, if you look at it from overs 50 to 80, even in the last game, is where we fall short, leaking (runs) a little bit. So, that's one area I think we need to get better at," Morkel said in the post-day press conference.

Morkel said the Indian bowlers could not sustain the momentum after taking three wickets in the morning session. *—PTI*

HENRY AND O'ROURKE SHINE

NZ leads England by 340 runs in 3rd Test on Day 2

HAMILTON, 15 DEC

New Zealand showed off its presumptive new ball attack as it took control of the third test against England on the second day Sunday.

Matt Henry and Will O'Rourke shared seven wickets as New Zealand bowled out England for 143 in a session and a half to take a 205-run first innings lead.

O'Rourke then had to bat for the second time in the day as nightwatchman when Will Young was out for 60 within 20 minutes of the close. He couldn't last to stumps at which New Zealand was 136-3, having increased its lead to 340.

Kane Williamson completed his 38th half century just before the close and was 50 not and Rachin Ravindra was 2.

Henry and O'Rourke likely will become New Zealand's new ball attack when Tim Southee retires at the end of this, his 107th test. They previewed that partnership Sunday as Henry took 4-48 and O'Rourke took 3-33 in an outstanding New Zealand bowling performance.

The duration of the partnership between Santner and O'Rourke was enough to cause England discomfort as it lifted New Zealand from 303-9 to 315-9 at stumps Saturday and on to 347.

England has an unassailable 2-0 lead in the series after winning the first test by eight wickets and the second by 323 runs.

New Zealand lost Tom Latham early in its second innings for 19 by Young and Williamson added 89 for the second wicket. Young remains without a century in 20 tests. *—PTI*

England has an unassailable 2-0 lead in the series after winning the first test by eight wickets and second by 323 runs PHOTO: AFP

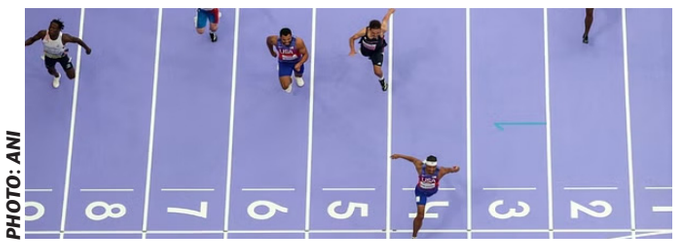


PHOTO: ANI

INDIA TO HOST ITS FIRST WORLD ATHLETICS TOUR

NEW DELHI, 15 DEC

India will host its maiden World Athletics Continental Tour event – a bronze-level global meet – in Bhubaneswar on August 10 next year, the national federation said on Sunday.

The announcement was made by the Athletics Federation of India (AFI) while releasing the competition calendar for 2025.

The Continental Tour is an annual series of track and field competitions held under the aegis of World Athletics and it forms the second tier of international one-day meetings after the prestigious Diamond League.

The bronze level Tour meet is below the gold and silver levels. This will be the first global athletics meet to be hosted by India after the international permit meets, held in the country in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

"This will be the first time and most prestigious global athletics event after the permit meets in the 80s and 90s and the World Half Marathon in 2004. This is a big achievement and will help athletics grow in the country," an AFI official said.

He said that India is also likely to host a global level javelin meet next year. "We are trying for a big global javelin event and hoping to get it," he said.

Riding on Olympic gold and silver medallist Neeraj Chopra's success, India is emerging as a global javelin powerhouse in world. *—PTI*

World 25k run: Kebede leads, Kissa defeats Ebenyo

KOLKATA, 15 DEC

Ethiopian Sutume Kebede retained the women's crown in the ninth edition of Tata Steel World 25K, the first World Athletics Gold Label Road Race at this distance, while Ugandan Stephen Kissa triumphed over the defending champion, Daniel Ebenyo from Kenya, in the men's race here on Sunday.

The Indian elite runners also returned with splendid performances, with Gulveer Singh setting a new event record and Sanjeevani taking the title in the women's category.

More than 20,500 people participated in various categories. Confirming her entry just two weeks before the race, Kebede recovered from a stomach ailment just in time to defend her title here in a modest 1:19:17.

Having set a stand-alone World Best for 25K here while winning last year's race with a time of 1:18:47, the Ethiopian runner started her campaign in 2024 with fantastic personal best in half-marathon (1:04:37) and marathon (2:15:55) to take the top spots in Houston and Tokyo respectively.

Gulveer Singh, 26, habitually breaks the national record in every distance event. He has improved the national marks in 5000 and 10,000m twice this year.

The Guangzhou Asian Games bronze medallist, who just eight weeks ago became the Asian cross-country champion, is now turning his focus towards road running.

Sawan Barwal, the 2023 Asian half-marathon bronze medallist, led Gulveer in a significant portion of the race. As in the international category, Gulveer broke away from Sawan and sprinted to finish first and also registered another Indian Best at this distance by clocking 1:14:10. *—PTI*

GOLF: MUTHAPPA, MISHRA FACE-OFF

CHANDIGARH, 15 DEC

Varun Muthappa of Karnataka will take on Anshul Mishra in the final of the IGU 123rd All India Amateur Golf Championship of India was held in the Chandigarh Golf Club. The two young stars are qualified for the championship laden with history by winning close matches.

Muthappa beat Ayaan Gupta on the 19th hole after both players were level at the end of 18 holes. In the other semi-final, Anshul Mishra beat Anant Ahlawat on the 18th hole.

Muthappa was the eighth seed while Mishra was the 15th seed and now they will battle it out in the 36-hole final, according to All India Amateur Golf press release.

In the semis Muthappa was 1-up over Gupta after three and nine, they were all square after thirteenth. Muthappa was again 1-over Gupta after fifteen but had an all-square after the eighteenth. Finally, Muthappa won over Gupta on the 19th hole. *—PTI*

NAMDHARI FC HUMBLE CONTENDERS REAL KASHMIR 1-0

LUDHIANA, 15 DEC

Title contenders Real Kashmir FC's first match away from home in the I-League 2024-25 season ended in disappointment as they went down to hosts Namdhari FC by a solitary goal here on Sunday.

While Namdhari now have seven points after round five and earned their second consecutive win, Real Kashmir have eight. The men from Srinagar suffered their first defeat.

Namdhari have now moved to fifth place in the points table and are breathing down Real Kashmir's neck, who are currently placed fourth.

Namdhari's Brazilian striker Cledson Dasilva Degol scored the only goal of the match in the 15th minute. Yet, the skillful player's day didn't end on a happy note as he received the marching orders in the 60th minute for a rather serious tackle-from-behind foul in the middle.

Real Kashmir were in real shock. They took time to take stock of the situation and began the second half in a whirlwind fashion. They stormed the rival goal but failed when it was needed most. *—PTI*

AMIDST RIVALRY

Brijinder gets 2nd term as IGU president

NEW DELHI, 15 DEC

Brijinder Singh was re-elected as the president of the Indian Golf Union (IGU) for a second consecutive term during the Annual General Meeting (AGM) here on Sunday.

The elections for IGU office-bearers and the Governing Council for the 2024–2026 term were held unopposed as the number of candidates matched the available positions.

Singh was the lone candidate for the president's post, while S K Sharma and Sanjiv Rattan were elected unopposed as secretary and treasurer, respectively.

The nine members elected to the Governing Council are Farzan R Heerjee (Jharkhand), Harpuneet Singh Sandhu (Chandigarh), Harish Kumar (Uttarakhand), Nagesh Singh (Assam), Dr Param Navdeep Singh (Rajasthan), Sameer Sinha (Gujarat), Shashank Sandu (Maharashtra), Simarjeet Singh (Uttar Pradesh), and Viren Singh Ghumman (Punjab).

"Most of the members have previously been part of the Governing Council and are experienced golfers. We are clear about our growth path and will continue to work in that direction," Brijinder Singh said.

The election, held at the India Habitat Centre, was conducted under the supervision of Justice (Retd) Rameshwar Singh Malik, who has been permitted by the Delhi High Court to supervise the polls as Returning Officer (RO). SPS Tomar was the representative from the Sports Ministry.

Justice (retd) Malik is the third appointee after Justice (retd) OP Garg and Justice (retd) Permod Kohli.

Interestingly, a rival faction led by IGU secretary-general Harish Shetty is conducting a parallel elective AGM at the Olympic Bhawan, the headquarters of the Indian Olympic Association, with Justice (Retd) O P Garg serving as the Returning Officer. Shetty is set to be elected president, alongside Basant Kumar Repswal as secretary-general. The Bengal Golf Association had earlier challenged Justice Malik's appointment as the RO. *—PTI*

Brijinder Singh PHOTO: X

- Singh was the lone candidate for the president's post, while S K Sharma and Sanjiv Rattan were elected as secretary and treasurer

Real, Rayo end up in high-scoring draw

BARCELONA, 15 DEC

Real Madrid was held at Rayo Vallecano to 3–3 in a thrilling derby, missing a chance to overtake Barcelona at the top of La Liga.

Rayo set a fast pace and stunned the powerhouse with two headed goals from Unai López and Abdul Mumin to lead 2–0 by the 36th minute.

Federico Valverde struck with a powerful shot from well outside the area to pull one back for Madrid. Then Jude Bellingham headed the visitors level from a pass by Rodrygo just before halftime.

Madrid looked on course to completing a comeback win when Rodrygo put them in front for the first time with a deflected shot in the 56th.

But Rayo midfield leader Isi Palazón stretched out a boot to steer Florian Lejeune's shot past Thibaut Courtois in the 64th.

Madrid was without striker Kylian Mbappé, who is nursing a left-thigh injury. Vinícius Júnior went on as a second-half substitute. Goalie Augusto Batalla saved the Brazilian's best effort in the final period.

Madrid remained second, one point behind Barcelona.

Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti admitted his team dropped its guard in defense when his players left López and Mumin unchecked to turn in crosses. But he said he was "satisfied" with his team's reaction, especially given the injuries to defensive starters Dani Carvajal, Eder Militao, and Ferland Mendy.

"Last year we didn't win here, we drew, and we won the league anyway," Ancelotti said. "We are playing well and on right path. We need to look toward next games." *—PTI*

Madrid remained second, one point behind Barcelona PHOTO: PTI